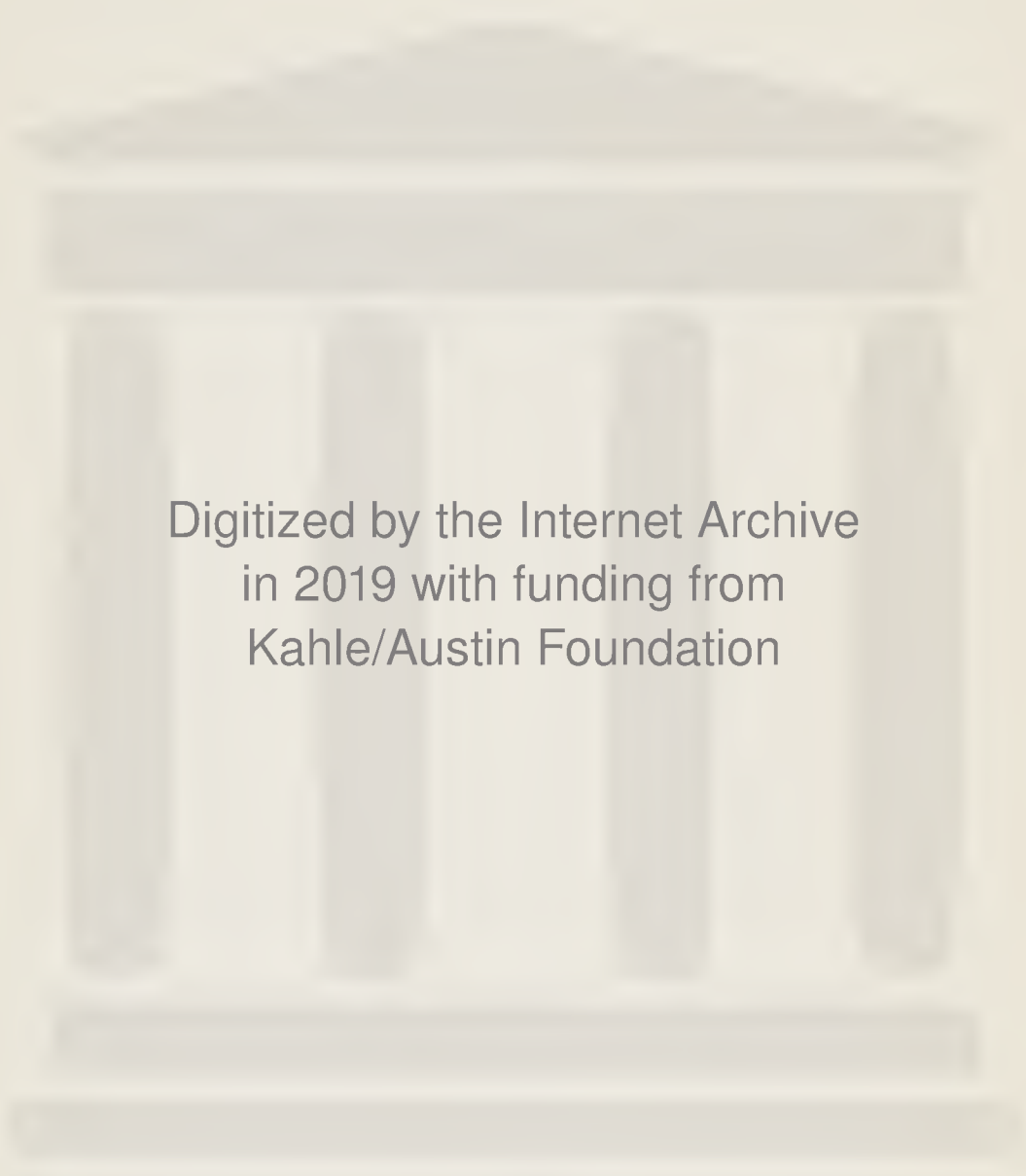


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JOHN FLETCHER

A STUDY IN DRAMATIC METHOD

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND LITERA-
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PREFACE.

A word is needed as to the topics chosen for discussion and the order of their arrangement.

The study makes no attempt at being exhaustive in its range of topics, but aims to bring into prominence certain of Fletcher's traits as a dramatist which deserve more attention than they have yet received. His poetical gifts, metrical qualities, and diction, have been fully and frequently treated elsewhere, and for this reason are not given a large share of attention here.

The investigation into Fletcher's *Choice and Treatment of Sources* and the discussion of his *Mastery of Stagecraft* are properly both parts of Chapter V on *General Dramatic Method*, but on account of their bulk and significance, each has been given a separate chapter, the one serving as an introduction and the other as a conclusion to the main chapter.

The last chapter, on *Spirit of the Comedies*, may be open to criticism as being beyond the limits laid down by the subject. It is included, however, because an understanding of Fletcher's characteristic mood and attitude has seemed a prime necessity to any full comprehension of his methods of work.

Among those who have helped me in the preparation of this study, Professors A. H. Tolman and R. M. Lovett, of the University of Chicago, and L. T. Damon, of Brown University, have been exceedingly kind and helpful in the way of criticism and suggestion, and Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach, formerly of the University of Pennsylvania, has rendered me a valuable service in placing in my hands his study—still unpublished—of the sources of the Beaumont-Fletcher plays. To Prof. A. H. Thorndike, of Northwestern University, also I am very greatly indebted, not only for his cordial courtesy to a stranger in consenting to read the proof sheets, but for very helpful comments, especially in connection with the last chapter. To Prof. F. I. Carpenter, of the University of Chicago, however, my most grateful acknowledgment is due. He suggested the undertaking, placed at my disposal the Beaumont-Fletcher folios and other rare books needed, and at every turn has stimulated and guided my work.

ORIE L. HATCHER.

Bryn Mawr College, May, 1905.

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I.

INTRODUCTION: PROBLEMS OF AUTHORSHIP IN THE BEAUMONT-FLETCHER PLAYS.

The history of opinion as to the authorship of the Beaumont-Fletcher plays shows the gradual re-emergence of two identities from the close literary partnership with which the names are associated in the popular mind. That some distinction was made between the two dramatists in their own day is to be inferred from the fact that each is known to have written separately during the period of their collaboration,¹ and also from the documentary evidence which indicates that many of the plays commonly attributed to both were not produced until after Beaumont's death.²

It is obvious, however, that the lines of demarcation between the two early became confused; for already in 1618-19 Drummond reports Jonson as saying that "Flesher and Beaumont, ten yeers since, hath written *The Faithfull Shipheardesse*, a tragicomedie well done,"³ whereas both Jonson⁴ and Beaumont⁵ had already addressed lines to Fletcher in commendation of his pastoral; nor is Jonson's other reported comment that "next himself only Fletcher and Chapman could write a masque"⁶ easy to understand in view of the fact that the only independent masque in the Beaumont-Fletcher plays has, from quite early

¹*The Faithful Shepherdess*, by Fletcher, and *The Masque of the Inner Temple* and minor poems by Beaumont.

See also the lines of Jasper Malne:

"For that you could write singly we may guess
By the divided pieces which the press
Hath severally sent forth."

Commendatory Verses, 1647 Folio. See Dyce ed., I, p. 75.

and that of Cartwright referring to Fletcher:

"'Tis known that sometimes he did stand alone." Ibid., p. 76.

Humphrey Moseley also in his *Stationer to the Reader* of the same folio declares:

"It was once in my thoughts to have printed Master Fletcher's works by themselves because singly and alone they would make a just volume."

²Records of Sir Henry Herbert as Deputy and Chief Master of the Revels: See Malone's Shakespeare, ed. Boswell, 111. pp. 224-243.

³*Ben Jonson's Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden*. Sh. Soc. 1846, p. 17.

⁴Lines prefixed to *The Faithful Shepherdess*.

⁵Ibid.

⁶See Note 3.

times, been attributed to Beaumont alone. The comment is possibly explicable—if fully accepted as Jonson's—on the supposition that he preferred the shorter incidental efforts of Fletcher, as contained in his plays, to the more elaborate work of Beaumont. Prof. Thorndike's suggestion, however, that Drummond, in his notes, confused Fletcher's name with Beaumont's seems on the whole more probable.¹

Seward is the somewhat dubious authority for the statement that during Beaumont's lifetime, Fletcher was "supposed unable to rise to any height of eminence. Yet no sooner had he lost that aid and demonstrated that it was delight and love, not necessity, which made him soar abreast with his amiable friend, but the still injurious world began to strip the plumes from Beaumont and to dress Fletcher in the whole fame, leaving to the former nothing but the mere pruning of Fletcher's luxurious wit."² This testimony as to Beaumont's being at first esteemed the greater genius of the two, while not borne out by most contemporary evidence, is in keeping with the facts that the earlier plays—as *Philaster*, *The Maid's Tragedy*, &c.—are the ones in which Beaumont's hand is unmistakably present, and that they were the most popular of the entire group.

However that may be, it is evident that by the time of the publication of the first folio in 1647, a strong tide in favor of Fletcher had already set in, until, as Seward declares, some were ready to dress him "in the whole fame." In the commendatory verses included in this folio, we come upon a considerable mass of opinion as to the literary relations of the two dramatists and, while it is held to be of no value in deciding the authorship of separate plays, it is interesting as voicing the theories of the time and as the probable source of traditions that have lasted to our own day. The views expressed are by no means uniform, although in general they take one of three directions:

(1) That Beaumont and Fletcher were equal geniuses fused into one by the force of perfect congeniality and not to be distinguished from each other in their work. Thus Berkenhead writes in his lines to Fletcher:

"But you were both for both, not semi-wits,
Each piece is wholly two, yet never split,
Ye're not two faculties and one soul, still
He the understanding, thou the quick free will,
But as two voices in one long embrace,
Fletcher's keen treble and deep Beaumont's bass,
Two full congenial souls, still both prevail'd,
His Muse and thine were quartered not impal'd."³

¹In a private letter, Apr. 18, 1905.

²1750 Ed. of Beaumont and Fletcher's Works. Preface.

³Commendatory Verses, 1647 Folio. See Dyce ed. I, pp. 80-81.

Jasper Maine has the same idea in his lines:

"Whether one did contrive, the other write,
Or one framed the plots, the other did indite,
Where'er your parts between yourselves lay, we
In all things which you did, but one thread see."¹¹

George Lisle sums up the theory more briefly in his couplet:

"For still your fancies are so woven and knit,
'Twas Francis Fletcher or John Beaumont writ."¹²

(2) That the plays were to be accredited to Fletcher alone, since Beaumont was not to be taken into serious account in explaining their production. Waller expresses this view in the lines,

"Fletcher, to thee we do not only owe
All these good plays, but those of others too."¹³

In this connection it is a significant fact that 26 of the 37 verse tributes found in the folio address themselves to Fletcher alone, and 25 of that number bear the heading "On Master John Fletcher's Works" or one of similar import. On the other hand, only 4 are addressed to Beaumont, and none of these make large claims for him except as to the quality of his work.

(3) That Fletcher was the genius and creator in the work and Beaumont the judicial and regulative force. Cartwright gives the extreme application of this theory:

"His [Fletcher's] thoughts and his thoughts' dress appeared both such,
That 'twas his happy fault to do too much,
Who therefore wisely did submit each birth
To knowing Beaumont, ere it did come forth,
Working again until he said 'twas fit,
And made him the sobriety of his wit."¹⁴

Howe has much the same thought:

"Perhaps his quill flew stronger when
'Twas weaved with his Beaumont's pen."¹⁵

This last view is the one which appears to have taken strongest hold on the popular mind, and from this time on, for more than a century, the name of Beaumont seems to sink into obscurity as compared

¹¹Ibid., p. 75.

¹²Ibid., p. 62.

¹³Ibid., p. 63. It is true that none of the plays in which Beaumont's part is sure are included in the folio of 1647, but Waller makes it clear by the later lines of his poem that he has in mind the whole body of the plays and not simply those of this folio.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 76.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 84.

with that of his fellow worker. Sir Aston Cockaine,¹ in his poems published² soon after the first folio, takes his cousin, Charles Cotton,³ and the publishers⁴ of the folio severely to task for not making it plain how large Fletcher's share in the plays had been. Cockaine introduces a new complication into the question of authorship, too, by his statements as to Massinger's having had part in some of the plays. His epitaph⁵ on Fletcher and Massinger makes reference to the same fact, and it seems probable that these testimonies furnish the starting point for the investigation, which has so largely engaged recent critics, as to the extent of Massinger's contribution to the Beaumont-Fletcher plays.

The tradition which Cartwright had so fully launched as to Fletcher's wielding "the pencil" and Beaumont "the sponge" is handed down through a succession of writers. Thus Fuller comments that Fletcher's "sail of phantasie" was held down by Beaumont's "ballast of judge-

¹The name is variously spelled Cokayne, Cockalne, Cokalne, Cockayne and Cockalne as here. I follow Dyce.

²*Poems*, 1662.

³I wonder, cousin, that you would permit
 So great an Injury to Fletcher's wit,
 Your friend and old Companion, that his fame
 Should be divided in another's name.
 If Beaumont had writ those plays, it had been
 Against his merits a detracting Sin
 Had they been attributed also to
 Fletcher
 Had Beaumont lived when this Edition came
 Forth and beheld his ever living name
 Before Plays that he never writ, how he
 Had frowned and blushed at such impiety.
 "And my good friend old Philip Massinger
 With Fletcher writ in some that we see here."
 For what a foul
 And inexcusable fault it is (that whole
 Volume of plays being almost every one
 After the death of Beaumont wrote) that none
 Would certifie them for so much. I wish as free
 Y'had told the Printers this as you did me." *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁴"To Mr. Humphrey Mosley and Mr. Humphrey Robinson.
 In the large book of plays you late did print
 In Beaumont's and in Fletcher's name, why in't
 Did you not justice? Give to each his due
 For Beaumont of those many writ in few
 And Massinger in other few. The Main
 Being sole Issues of sweet Fletcher's brain." *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁵"*Epitaph on Mr. John Fletcher and Mr. Philip Massinger.*
 In the same grave Fletcher was buried, here
 Lies the stage poet, Philip Massinger.
 Playes they did write together, were great friends
 And now one grave includes them at their ends." *Ibid.*, p. 166.

ment; both compounding a Poet to admiration,"¹ and Aubrey testifies on the authority of Dr. Earle, a friend of both the dramatists, that Beaumont's "maine businesse was to correct the overflowings of Mr. Fletcher's witt."²

Dryden's statement that "their plots were generally more regular than Shakespeare's, especially those which were made before Beaumont's death,"³ would seem to indicate some definite recognition of Beaumont, as would his praise of the latter's judgment, as being in matters pertaining to dramatic construction so accurate that "Ben Jonson while he lived submitted all his writings to his censure and 'tis thought used his judgment in correcting, if not contriving, all his plots."⁴ On the other hand, however, Dryden most frequently alludes to the plays as if they were entirely Fletcher's, even to the very ones which were obviously written before Beaumont's death, and if he discriminates at all between the two, is certainly more zealous to analyze Fletcher's style and to compare him with Shakspeare than he shows himself to be in the case of Beaumont.

Langbaine⁵ is among the earliest of the critics to undertake any definite assignment of plays. Even he, however, frankly declares that little is known about the matter. Thus in his introduction to his list of the plays, he remarks: "I wish I were able to give the reader a more perfect account of what plays he [Fletcher] writ in alone, in what plays he was assisted by the judicious Beaumont, and which were the plays in which old Phil Massinger had a hand, but Mr. Charles Cotton being dead, I know none but Sir Aston Cockain (if he be yet alive), that can satisfy the world in this particular."

The allotments which Langbaine attempts are neither extensive nor reliable and he makes slight effort to support them by proof. He drops a caution, as Dryden had done, against treating the plays as an inseparable group, declaring that "Mr. Fletcher himself, after Mr. Beaumont's death, composed several dramatic pieces which were worthy of the pen of so great a master." He builds upon the old foundations by making "Mr. Fletcher's wit equal to Mr. Beaumont's judgment," finds Fletcher's peculiar gift to be a briskness and liveliness of expression, and declares that

¹*History of the Worthies of England*, 1662. See ed. 1811, II, p. 168.

²*Brief Lives, Chiefly of Contemporaries, Set down by John Aubrey between the years 1669 and 1696*. See ed. 1898, pp. 95-6.

³*Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. Scott-Saintsbury ed., XV, pp. 345-6.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 345.

See also for further discussion of the Beaumont-Fletcher plays:

Defense of the Epilogue of the Second Part of the Conquest of Granada or an Essay of the Dramatic Poetry of the Last Age. Same ed., IV, pp. 225-243.

Preface to Troilus and Cressida or The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy, VI, pp. 254-283.

Heads of An Answer to Rymer. XV, pp. 381-392.

⁵*An Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (1691), pp. 203-218.

"no man ever understood or drew the passions more lively than he." Langbaine's assignment of *The Woman Hater* to Fletcher was probably the basis of a long line of erroneous assumptions by others in the distribution of the plays. On the other hand, his allotment of *The Woman's Prize* and *The Faithful Shepherdess* to Fletcher and of *The Masque of the Inner Temple* to Beaumont have been justified by all later investigation, while his declaration of Shakspeare's part with Fletcher in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* has been borne out by the conclusions of Spalding,¹ Hickson² and other close students of the play.

Collier in his famous *Short View* (1697-8) suggests that Beaumont was guilty of greater indelicacy of language than Fletcher, and bases his suggestion on the claim that the earliest plays have the largest number of objectionable passages.³ The claim is hardly capable of proof, but is interesting in contrast with the recent tendency to credit Beaumont with an imagination essentially purer and more delicate than Fletcher's.

The octavo edition of 1711⁴ attempts no solution of the problems of authorship, beyond the slight suggestion that Shirley's traditional part in the plays was in the way of completing some left unfinished by Fletcher at his death. *The Coronation* and *The Night Walker*⁵ or *The Little Thief* are cited as plays on which both worked in this fashion, although the editor declares that Shirley tried to claim both as entirely his own creations.

With the edition of 1750,⁶ begun by Theobald but finished by Symphon and Seward, we come upon what appears to be the first serious attempt at a critical discussion of the separate shares of Beaumont and Fletcher in the plays. The discussion has interest, not only because it

¹A Letter on Shakspeare's Authorship of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (1833). Reprinted by New Sh. Soc., 1874. Appendix, p. 21.

²*The Shares of Shakspeare and Fletcher in The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review, XCII-LXXVII, Apr., 1847, pp. 59-88. Reprinted in New Sh. Soc., Trans'sns, 1874, appendix, p. 25.

³A *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*. 2d ed., 1898, pp. 51-53.

⁴*The Works of Beaumont and Fletcher*, in 7 vols. London, etc., 1711. See Preface Giving Some Account of the Authors and Their Writings.

⁵*The Night Walker* is certified to in the Herbert MS. as Fletcher's work revised by Shirley. See Malone Shakspeare, ed. Boswell, III, p. 236. Malone mentions also that Shirley corrected and finished *Love's Pilgrimage* and cites the Herbert MS. as authority *Ibid.*, p. 226.

⁶*The Works of Mr. Francis Beaumont and Mr. John Fletcher*. In 10 vols. Collected with all former editions and corrected, with notes critical and explanatory. By the late Mr. Theobald, Mr. Seward of Eyam in Derbyshire, and Mr. Symphon of Gainesborough, etc. London, 1750. See Introduction, written as a Preface to the Preface of the 1711 edition.

revives definitely the claims of Beaumont, but also because of the contradictory views which the two later editors express upon the point at issue.

Sympson, on the one hand, distrusts any effort to discriminate between the work of Beaumont and that of Fletcher, since he finds both internal and external evidence entirely inadequate for proof. As to the internal evidence, he declares that Beaumont's accuracy and Fletcher's wit are so indistinguishable that "were we not sure to a demonstration that the masque was the former's and *The Faithful Shepherdess* the latter's sole production, they might each have passed for the concurrent labors of both or have changed hands; and the last have been taken for Beaumont's and the former for Fletcher's." The external or documentary proof—considerable as it is in the testimonies of the early versifiers, publishers, writers of prologues, &c.—he regards as too contradictory and incomplete to warrant any safe deductions from it.

Seward, however, is convinced that Beaumont and Fletcher are not inseparable and evolves an interesting method of discriminating between them. He begins by reviewing the course of criticism down to his own day and declares that grave injustice has been done Beaumont in representing him as a mere pruning knife for Fletcher's wit, or even, at times as a dead weight upon Fletcher's "boughs of palm." He calls attention to the fact that both Cartwright¹ and Harris²—whom he blames most for the derogatory tradition—wrote long after Beaumont's day, while Earle,³ whose verses came immediately after Beaumont's death and who appears to have had a personal acquaintance with him, credited him with the chief share in *The Maid's Tragedy* and *Philaster*, and definitely assigned to him the character of Bessus in *A King and No King*. Seward also combatted the tradition that Beaumont was "the grave, solemn, tragic poet only," and maintained that, on the contrary, his peculiar gift was for the comic Jonsonian humor. This gift he first discerned in the portrayal of Bessus. Coming later to study *The Woman Hater*, he detected evident marks of Jonson's manner in that as well, but being deceived by Langbaine's ascription of the play to Fletcher, he did not at first connect the two plays in his mind or think of a common authorship for them. Afterwards he came upon Beaumont's letter⁴ to Jonson in which the former speaks of "the two precedent comedies then not finished." From the position of the letter in the second folio im-

¹See Dyce ed. I, pp. 76-78, for poems reprinted from 1647 Folio.

²Ibid., pp. 87-89.

³Ibid., pp. 72-74.

⁴Dyce ed., II, 955-6.

mediately after *Nice Valour* or *the Passionate Madman*, Seward concludes that play to be one of the two referred to, and then on the basis of similarity, as well as from certain documentary evidence, selects *The Woman Hater* as the other. The similarity of the two plays he traces not only in the "personizing of humors" as shown in *Chamont*¹ and *Labarillo*,² but also in the contemptuous complacency of the author as found alike in the epilogue of *Nice Valour* and the prologue of *The Woman Hater*. He strengthens the evidence as to Jonson's influence, too, by Beaumont's own suggestion in the letter that Jonson was his master.³ Following these earlier tests and educing also from *The Woman Hater* proof of Beaumont's gift for the "burlesque sublime," he comes to detect the same hand in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, *The Little French Lawyer*, *The Scornful Lady*, *Love's Cure*, *Wit Without Money*, *The Custom of the Country*, and, with less certainty, in *The Humorous Lieutenant*, *The Maid in the Mill*, *The False One*, *Cupid's Revenge*, *The Noble Gentleman*, *The Coxcomb*, *The Spanish Curate* and *The Laws of Candy*.

On the basis of these assignments, Seward gives also some differentiation of the styles and methods of the two dramatists. Thus he declares that while in tragedy both alike followed nature, they differed in comedy, since Beaumont studied books and Jonson, while Fletcher applied himself chiefly to Shakspeare and men—the one drawing nature "in her extremes" and the other showing her in "her usual dress." Seward further adds that for the reason that Fletcher knew so well the life of his own day, "the gay sprightliness and natural ease of his young men are held to be superior to Beaumont's and, indeed, even to Shakspeare's."

The conclusion of the whole matter then is, according to Seward, that "these twins of poetry, greatly resembling, are yet still distinct"; but that any attempt to add to the fame of one by detracting from that of the other is unamiable and unjustifiable, since they were, after all, in Berkenhead's phrase, "two full, congenial souls."⁴

It must be granted that Seward's reasoning is not always safe, and

¹In *Nice Valour*.

²In *The Woman Hater*.

³"Fate once again
Bring me to thee who canst make smooth and plain
The way of knowledge for me and then I
Who have no good but in thy company
Protest it will my greatest comfort be
To acknowledge all I have to flow from thee."

⁴See p. 8 of this study for lines containing this phrase. Dyce ed. II, p. 956.

the commentator of the edition of 1778¹ has so far convicted him of inaccuracy in regard to documentary evidence as to show that his inferences from the quartos and folios in regard to the authorship of *The Woman Hater* and of *Nice Valour* are largely unwarranted. Moreover, the mutilations to which he and his colleague subjected the texts of the plays have earned for them ever since the anathemas of critics. At the same time, it should be remembered that Seward was among the first, if not actually the first, to rebuke the earlier injustice to Beaumont, or to attempt any critical characterization of him, and while there are various errors in his data and arguments, the chief traits which he ascribed to Beaumont are those which later research has established as correct. In his claim of *The Woman Hater* for Beaumont, too, he anticipated by more than a century the conclusions to which both metrical and literary critics have come. If his suggestion had been heeded instead of Langbaine's, Weber, Darley and Dyce might have avoided a wrong starting point and much time might have been saved.

It seems quite possible, however, that Seward's theory was little known; for Chalmers in his *Works of the English Poets*,² published in 1810, cites Egerton Brydges as making just remonstrance against the continued wrong to Beaumont and as commending *A Companion to the Play-House*, or as it was later known, the *Biographia Dramatica* (1769) for its unassisted efforts to revive the interest in him. It is noticeable, too, that neither Cibber's *Lives of the Poets*³ (1753) nor the book just cited seems to recognize at all the suggestions of Seward, for the first declares the questions of authorship still quite unsettled, and the second, while making a larger claim than Seward's for Beaumont, has no reference to the grounds on which he bases his conclusions, and emphasizes the old theory of Beaumont's superior gravity, against which Seward had protested vigorously.

Evidently, however, Beaumont was rising steadily in favor, for the editor of the *Biographia Dramatica*,⁴ without even attempting any close proof of his assertions, credits Beaumont with a share in much the greater part of the fifty-three plays which are listed, and thinks it probable that he made the plots, wrote the serious passages and then—after Fletcher

¹Dramatic Works of Beaumont and Fletcher. (See Introduction.) Edited by Geo. Colman. London, 1778. 10 vols.

²VI, pp. 175-7. Introduction to Beaumont's *Minor Poems*.

³*Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland to the time of Dean Swift*, etc., pp. 154-164.

⁴See ed. 1812 I, pp. 23-26. *Biographia Dramatica or a Companion to the Playhouse*. Originally compiled to the year 1764 by David Erskine Baker and continued to 1782 by Isaac Reed. Brought down to Nov., 1811, by Stephen Jones. London 1769 and 1812.

had added the light and lively scenes—cut down the excesses of wit and reduced the whole to final symmetry. This is, of course, a large claim to make for Beaumont, and one on the whole insupportable; but it is significant of the changed trend of opinion.

Thus far, most critics had apparently felt themselves free to make any assignment of the plays which internal evidence suggested and had given little attention to the question of chronological proofs. It was in this way that the early editor of the *Biographia Dramatica* had come to attribute to Beaumont a part in most of the plays, and that others had generalized with almost equal daring on the basis of real or fancied resemblances. With Malone's publication, in 1790, of the *Herbert Manuscript*,¹ however, such sweeping inferences were shown to be unsafe, since Herbert's entries in his Office Book as Deputy and Chief Master of the Revels proved that many of the plays were not licensed until after Beaumont's death. The evidence² seemed to serve the important end of removing the possibility of Beaumont's having had any part in several hitherto doubtful plays and, taken in connection with statements by Herbert as to the authorship of certain of the plays, suggested a group which, at least tentatively, might be treated as Fletcher's alone and as serving to mark his style.³

Weber in his edition of 1812⁴ was one of the first to avail himself of Malone's disclosures. He took up the question of authorship at some length and hazarded various conjectures and claims. He thought it "not improbable that Fletcher, like Ben Jonson, took advantage of the judgment of Beaumont to submit his performances to his correction and that the two were gradually led by a congeniality of mind to compose dramas in conjunction." He brought forward evidence to prove that Fletcher not only wrote alone during Beaumont's lifetime, but also collaborated with other dramatists. The plays written by Fletcher alone at that time he takes to be four, and those in which he worked after Beaumont's death thirty; while the number in which Beaumont and Fletcher wrote together is reckoned at eighteen. Massinger's collaboration with Fletcher, he thinks, occurred soon after Beaumont's death, and he finds traces also in this later group, of Shakspeare, Shirley, Rowley, Middle-

¹*A Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the English Stage*, etc. (1790.)

See Malone's *Shakespeare*, ed. Boswell, III, pp. 224-243.

²Darley and Oliphant have both attempted to invalidate the above assumption from the Herbert MS. as to Beaumont. See pp. 17 and 22 of this study.

³See p. 27 of this study, however, for comment on safety of inductions based on Herbert's records.

⁴*Works of Beaumont and Fletcher in 14 vols., with Introduction and Explanatory Notes*. Edinboro, 1812. See *Introduction*.

ton, Jonson, Field and Daborne. On the whole, however, Weber added little that was either safe or valuable to the conclusions of earlier critics. He is suggestive in some of his comments, but several of his conclusions have been entirely rejected by later students.

Darley in his edition¹ of Beaumont and Fletcher brought out in 1839, assigns twenty plays to Fletcher alone—seventeen on the basis of the Herbert MS., two lost ones for which licenses are recorded, and *The Faithful Shepherdess*, otherwise certified to. The eighteen available plays of this group he regards as an ample basis for the study of Fletcher's distinctive traits. Ten other plays Darley inclines to attribute in part to Beaumont, although only three—*Philaster*, *The Maid's Tragedy* and *A King and No King* are incontrovertibly proved to be joint productions. The first two of these, however, according to Darley, furnish the chief claim of the dramatists to high fame and so constitute a strong argument for the excellence of Beaumont's genius. In three of the remaining twenty-six plays Darley finds traces of Beaumont's graver qualities and ventures the interesting conjecture that several of the plays not brought out until after Beaumont's death were planned and perhaps written with his collaboration at an earlier period.² The study which Darley made of the metrical qualities of the plays was a departure from the ordinary lines of criticism and along with the appreciative discussions of Coleridge, probably furnished the incentive to the later metrical critics. He directed attention also to Massinger's versification as being markedly of the school of Beaumont and Fletcher, and yet showing differences from that of either of the two.³

Dyce in his edition of 1843-6³ gives considerable attention to the apportionment of plays. Following Langbaine he assigns *The Woman Hater* to Fletcher, and with this as an example of Fletcher's manner, discovers the same hand as working alone in twenty-six other plays, while fourteen of the remaining are taken to be by Beaumont and Fletcher jointly, and sixteen by Fletcher and some writer or writers other than Beaumont. These decisions, however, are made largely on the basis of literary instinct, together with such slight chronological evidence as was available, and while many of the assignments have been

¹*The Works of Beaumont and Fletcher. With an Introduction by George Darley.* London, 1839. The edition here quoted, however, is a later one of 1880. See pp. xix-xxi of the *Introduction*.

²Cf. Olliphant's elaboration of this same possibility in his series of articles in *Englische Studien*, XIV-XVI. See also p. 22 of this study for treatment of same subject.

³*The Works of Beaumont and Fletcher.* 11 vols., 1843-6. See *Introduction*, pp. 14-46.

substantiated by later critics, various others have been set aside as unwarranted. When once his fundamental assumption as to the authorship of *The Woman Hater* had been rejected, it was easy, of course, to distrust generally his allotment of plays to Fletcher.

Of the purely literary critics,¹ the host multiplies steadily from the first decade of the nineteenth century. Lamb (1808),² Schlegel (1811)³ and Coleridge⁴ were the chief earlier ones; but none of these showed any inclination to discriminate closely between the work of the two dramatists. Schlegel indeed, like Sympson, was inclined to depreciate any such effort and found throughout the plays only one spirit and manner, while Coleridge declared that he had "never been able to distinguish the presence of Fletcher during the lifetime of Beaumont nor the absence of Beaumont during the survival of Fletcher."⁵ Hazlitt (1821)⁶ attempts no definite distinctions, nor does Hallam (1840),⁷ Leigh Hunt (1855)⁸ agrees to the early tradition about Beaumont's greater seriousness, but maintains that each could shift his style and mood as he thought proper. Donne (1858),⁹ Craik (1864)¹⁰ and Miss Crofts (1884)¹¹ all follow Schlegel's general theory, Donne even declaring that a comparison of the plays attributed to Beaumont and Fletcher jointly with those considered to be by Fletcher alone, makes the wit and judgment theory "depart into the lumber room of respectable fallacies." In proof of this, he finds *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* as full of unchecked animal spirits as anything which Fletcher is thought to have written alone and insists that several in the earlier group of plays are marked by traits which are held to be distinctly characteristic of Fletcher. Swinburne (1875),¹² on the other hand, finds Beaumont's spirit so dominant in the plays which he wrote that it is hard to discover Fletcher in them at all. He points out, too, that while Beaumont's genius

¹The chronological order is departed from here in order to bring the æsthetic or primarily literary criticism of the nineteenth century together. The more technical criticism is thus treated in two divisions—one preceding and the other immediately following this discussion.

²*Characters of Dramatic Writers*. Temple ed. 1897, IV, pp. 233-252.

³*Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, ed. 1846, pp. 466-474.

⁴*Table Talk* (1835). See Ashe ed. 1896 IV, pp. 193, 214, 234, 276, etc. *Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare and other Dramatists*, ed. Ashe, 1885, pp. 425-451.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 399.

⁶*Lectures on the Literature of the Age of Elizabeth*, ed. 1884, pp. 107-126.

⁷*Introduction to the Literature of Europe*, ed. 1884, III, pp. 309-325.

⁸*Beaumont and Fletcher, or the Finest Scenes, Lyrics, and Other Beauties of the Two Poets*, etc. See Introduction, *Remarks on Beaumont and Fletcher*.

⁹*Essays on the Drama and Popular Amusements*, ed. 1863, pp. 50-52.

¹⁰*A Compendious History of English Literature*, ed. 1890, I, pp. 600-603.

¹¹*Chapters in the History of English Literature from 1589 to the Close of the Elizabethan Period*, pp. 258-283.

¹²*Encyclopædia Britannica*. Article on *Beaumont and Fletcher*, pp. 469-474.

was for tragedy and broad farce, Fletcher's was for the heroic romance and high comedy.¹ Bullen (1889)² continues the exaltation of Beaumont in finding him richer in versification and more stately and strenuous in manner, while Lowell (1892),³ furnishes an interesting contrast by championing Fletcher as the riper, graver, more picturesque of the two and in all respects the greater poet.

From all these writers, however, we have rather affirmation than proof, and while it is evident that the center of interest has shifted almost steadily since Seward's time from Fletcher to Beaumont, there is little closely critical evidence in justification of the change. It is to the metrical critics that we must look chiefly for this, and in order to follow the line of their work uninterruptedly we go back some years at this point. The account of their researches perhaps admits of some detail, both because of the importance of its bearing on our later investigation and because of the necessity for fairly minute explanation in order to render it intelligible.

Fleay's paper⁴ on metrical tests as applied to Beaumont, Fletcher and Massinger, which was read before the New Shakspeare Society in 1874, marks a departure in the method of apportioning the plays. He brings to bear upon them a system of tests already applied by him to the doubtful plays of Shakspeare, and by means of it distributes them by acts, scenes or lines, according to the indications of the metre, making his chief allotments to Beaumont, Fletcher and Massinger, but including also, as Weber had done, Shirley, Middleton, Rowley, Field, Jonson, and in addition Dekker, in the list of contributing authors. He divides the plays into three groups of seventeen each.⁵

I. Those before Beaumont's death.

II. Those by Fletcher alone—(presumably later than the first).

III. Those by Fletcher and others not Beaumont, or not by Fletcher at all.

The second group of plays is made the starting point for investigation, because of evidence—documentary and otherwise—of their being Fletcher's. By close examination of the metre of these plays, Fleay satisfies himself that its chief marks are the following:

¹A *Study of Shakspeare*, ed. 1880, p. 89, note.

²*Dictionary of National Biography* (1889). Article on *Fletcher*, pp. 301-311.

³*Old English Dramatists*, ed. 1892, pp. 100-102.

⁴*Metrical Tests as Applied to Dramatic Poetry*, Part II. *Fletcher, Beaumont, Massinger*. New Sh. Soc., 1874, pp. 51-72.

⁵He omits from this group *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* as chiefly Shakspeare's and *The Laws of Candy* as not belonging at all to either Beaumont or Fletcher.

- (1) The prevalence of double endings—the range in a play being from 1,500 to 2,000.
- (2) The use of end-stopt lines in connection with double endings.
- (3) A moderate use of rhyme.
- (4) A moderate use of lines of less than five measures.
- (5) No prose.
- (6) Many trisyllabic feet, so that the verse does not easily lend itself to scansion or to the detection of alexandrines.

Having, in this way, arrived at what appears to him to be Fletcher's characteristic method of verse, Fleay makes a similar study of the plays commonly accepted as Massinger's. From these he concludes Massinger's range of double endings to be 900-1,200; his aversion to prose to be fully as marked as Fletcher's; his use of rhyme similarly moderate; and his tendency to lines of less than five measures not so frequent as Fletcher's.

Beaumont's metrical style he discovers by applying the tests for Fletcher to *The Four Plays in One*—that obviously having been written before Beaumont's death. In it he finds the first two plays to be markedly different in versification from the last two, which meet all the requirements for Fletcher. He feels justified, therefore, in concluding that the first are by Beaumont, and from them he deduces the following metrical peculiarities:

- (1) A much smaller proportion of double-endings than obtains in Fletcher's work.
- (2) A tendency to incomplete and run-on lines.
- (3) Rhyme.
- (4) Use of prose.

Applying these several tests to the three main groups of plays, he assigns to Beaumont and Fletcher jointly fourteen of the plays written before the former's death, and gives to Massinger a part in eight of those belonging to the third group, with a possibility of his share in two others.

Fleay's paper was vigorously debated at the meeting before which it was read and various defects and dangers in his method were at once pointed out. Indeed, he himself came to recognize many errors in his first conclusions, and in a later paper¹ modified them and undertook to establish more careful chronological foundations.

In spite of all Fleay's mistakes, however, the movement which he

¹*On the Chronology of the Plays of Fletcher and Massinger*, in *Eng. Stud.*, IX, pp. 12-35. (1886.)

had initiated was an important one and quickly attracted attention. In 1882 Robert Boyle began a series of articles in *Englische Studien*,¹ which took up the same line of research and elaborated Fleay's plan into one somewhat safer and broader in its procedure. The series came, however, in part at least, as a protest against Fleay's tendency to give Fletcher too large a share in the plays, and soon made it evident that with Boyle the emphasis was shifted to Massinger.

The study included some examination of the style of each of the three dramatists—Beaumont, Fletcher, and Massinger—and laid great stress on the literary qualities as corroborative of the testimony of the metrical. Fleay's tests were pronounced inadequate and, in some cases, otherwise faulty. Thus rhyme and prose could afford no proof in decisions between Fletcher and Massinger, because both Fletcher and Massinger avoided the use of either, and so these tests would be of value only in distinguishing between Fletcher and Beaumont. The short line test Boyle rejected entirely, while that of the double ending was the only one which seemed to him useful for all cases, because of the different proportions of such endings to be found in each dramatist's accepted work. To this last test, along with the restricted use of rhyme and the prose tests, he added three others, light and weak endings, and run-on lines. The result of his investigation was a conviction that Beaumont and Massinger had the same metrical qualities though in different degrees, while Fletcher, being older, was less affected than either of the other two by the new fashions in verse. In the sixty-nine plays taken to contain all the authentic work of Beaumont, Fletcher and Massinger, Beaumont is given a part in twelve, Massinger a part with Fletcher alone in seventeen, Fletcher sixteen alone, and Massinger fourteen.

Boyle's study of Massinger's literary style and his enlargement of the scheme of metrical tests were the definite contributions which he made to the investigation under discussion. His zeal for Massinger was doubtless pushed too far, but it was soon counterbalanced by the appearance in the field of two champions for Beaumont.

In Macaulay's study of Beaumont,² which appeared while Boyle's series of articles was in progress (1883), we have a revival of Seward's effort to define the figure of Beaumont more clearly. The effort was far more successful than the earlier one had been because the author proceeded by more careful and genuinely critical methods. He built to some extent upon a revision of Fleay's results and made a valuable

¹*Beaumont, Fletcher and Massinger*, Eng. Stud., V, VII, VIII, IX, X. (1882-7.)

²*Francis Beaumont, A Critical Study*. G. C. Macaulay, London, 1883.

study of the metrical peculiarities of both Fletcher and Beaumont, but he was not content with defining the limits of their production, and—at least for Beaumont—sought to construct a real literary individuality. He distinguished so sharply, however, between the two dramatists, not only in the more common literary qualities, but in the subtler matters of wit and morality, that Herford is hardly unjust in declaring that the critic at times appears to have lost his sense of the finer points of contact between the two.¹

Oliphant² was the second of these defenders of Beaumont's claim and reverted definitely to the school of the metrical tests, although, like Boyle, he protested against over-emphasis upon such tests and devoted a considerable portion of his discussion to the treatment of the literary characteristics of the plays. His main contention, however, was for an expansion of Darley's suggestion—that many of the doubtful plays were first written by Beaumont alone, or Beaumont and Fletcher together, and later rewritten by other authors. By placing the beginnings of the literary partnership as early as 1604, he contrives a plausible assignment to Beaumont of a part in twenty-three plays, besides the masque and a possible part in two other plays. He does this, too, without detracting appreciably from Fletcher's supposed contribution to the whole mass of plays, because most of those involved in his decisions belong to a group in which it seems clear that Fletcher had, at best, only a part.

Thorndike,³ who is the last of those that have made detailed examination into the metrical tests, seems inclined to accept Oliphant's general conclusion that the date for the beginnings of collaboration by Beaumont and Fletcher is as early as 1605, but finds meagre support for Oliphant's assignments to Beaumont.⁴

Looking back from this point over the labors of critics, it at least seems clear that Beaumont and Fletcher may no longer be regarded as one and inseparable. In the midst of the confusion of literary and met-

¹Review of Macaulay's study *Academy*, XXIV, p. 409.

²*Eng. Stud.*, XIV, XV, XVI, 1890-92.

³*The Influence of Beaumont and Fletcher on Shakespeare*. Ashley H. Thorndike, Worcester, 1901. See p. 23.

⁴Thorndike himself proposed as a supplement to the definitely metrical tests what he called the 'em-them test, finding Fletcher's tendency to use 'em for them most marked, Massinger's practice invariably against it and Beaumont's less certain. The test would therefore be valuable in distinguishing between Fletcher and Massinger, although useless in connection with Beaumont. *Ibid.*, pp. 24-29. Later, however, in an addendum to his book, Thorndike retracts this test as not being substantiated by an original quartos of Massinger recently examined by him, inasmuch as the proportion of 'ems and thems found in these was different from those elsewhere discovered. Those for Beaumont, Fletcher and Shakespeare, however, were corroborative of Thorndike's claims in connection with them.

rical standards and the conflicting opinions that inevitably result, two individualities have outlined themselves, and while we shall probably never be able to discriminate between them everywhere or with unerring precision, it must surely be an undertaking of interest to discover more fully the distinctive artistic and spiritual traits which each merged into a common dramatic activity.

Since the reaction set in against the early injustice to Beaumont, criticism has been busy discovering his points of superiority to Fletcher, and it is chiefly these which Macaulay has unified and emphasized in his study of Beaumont. If, in his zeal for his subject, he has seemed able to grant to Fletcher few but the undesirable or negative traits, it is only because Beaumont and Fletcher had—as Seward insisted—along with their strong affinities, certain definite differences of gifts; and a continuous insistence on the merits of one inevitably tends to throw the other into a hazy and unflattering background.

It is one of the assumptions on which this study rests—and one perhaps justifiable in view of the proofs brought forward by Macaulay and others—that Fletcher was somewhat below Beaumont in the deeper intellectual and spiritual traits. That he evinced, however, in his work an individuality fully as marked as Beaumont's and in some points more highly endowed are facts which admit of equally clear demonstration. Such a demonstration has not yet been attempted, and it is the purpose of this study to suggest its beginnings.

II.

PLAN AND MATERIAL.

The method proposed in this study is a simple one. Those plays which, by general consent of critics,¹ are accredited entirely to Fletcher, will be taken as a basis for investigation, and some deductions as to his attitude and working principles will be attempted from them. In general, no effort will be made either to controvert or to confirm any of the decisions of critics as to the authorship of disputed plays.

The whole body of plays commonly attributed to Beaumont and Fletcher will, for convenience, be considered in three groups, and single plays will be referred to as of Group I, II, or III.

(1). Group I consists of those plays in which critics agree to give Beaumont at least a part, viz.: *Philaster*, *The Maid's Tragedy*, *A King and No King*, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* and *The Scornful Lady*. To this group *The Woman Hater* may now surely be added, although Dyce in 1854 still claimed it entirely for Fletcher. *The Masque of the Inner Temple* is quite generally given to Beaumont alone.

(2) In Group II are included the plays which are accredited to Fletcher alone: *Monsieur Thomas*, *Wit Without Money*, *The Loyal Subject*, *Bonduca*,² *The Mad Lover*, *The Humorous Lieutenant*, *Valentinian*, *Women Pleased*, *The Island Princess*,³ *The Pilgrims*, *The Wild Goose Chase*, *The Chances*, *The Woman's Prize*, *Rule a Wife and Have*

¹Two exceptions, however, are given in notes (2) and (3).

²Olliphant (*Eng. Stud.*, XV, p. 335) suggests that this play is a revision of an early play of Beaumont's, though retaining little of the original material. I have seen no sign of the general adoption of his suggestion, however, and so have felt justified in still retaining in this group so important and characteristic a play.

³One of the younger critics, Mr. A. S. W. Rosenbach, who in December, 1902, read a paper before The Modern Language Association on *The Spanish Sources of Beaumont and Fletcher*, is inclined to attribute to Massinger a part in *The Island Princess*. This view does, of course, disturb the unanimity of verdict on which the present assignment of plays claims to be based; but it has been thought best to retain the play in group II for the purposes of the present study, both because Mr. Rosenbach's argument is still unpublished and also because the present writer—in this case also taking the judicial attitude—feels that the resemblances to Massinger's own plays, while certainly very strong in some respects, are not so conclusive as to make his collaboration indispensable. No striking inferences as to Fletcher's dramatic method, however, will be based upon this play since there seems some real ground for uncertainty.

a *Wife*, and *A Wife for a Month*. *The Faithful Shepherdess*, although well authenticated as Fletcher's, will not usually be discussed along with the other plays of Group II, because of its essential difference from them in nature and technique. The *Four Plays in One*—now divided between Beaumont and Fletcher, Beaumont being given the Induction and the Triumphs of *Honor* and of *Love* and Fletcher the *Triumphs of Death* and of *Time*—will for the same reason be omitted. Exception from this rule will be indicated wherever this is necessary for clearness.

(3) Group III contains all the remaining plays in which Fletcher is commonly supposed to have had a share, and includes two sub-groups:¹

(a) Those plays in which Beaumont's collaboration seems possible, but considerably more doubtful than in those of Group I: *Cupid's Revenge*, *The Coxcomb*, *The Captain*, *Thierry and Theodoret*, *Wit at Several Weapons* and *The Knight of Malta*.

(b) Plays in which Fletcher apparently collaborated with others than Beaumont or in which the earlier work of one or both of the two seems to have been revised or completed by others. These are: *Nice Valour or The Passionate Madman*, *The Little Thief or The Night Walker*, *The Beggar's Bush*, *The Honest Man's Fortune*, *Love's Pilgrimage*, *The Bloody Brother or Rollo, Duke of Normandy*, *The Queen of Corinth*, *The Custom of the Country*, *The Double Marriage*, *The Laws of Candy*, *The Little French Lawyer*, *The False One*, *The Prophetess*, *The Sea Voyage*, *The Spanish Curate*, *The Maid in the Mill*, *The Lover's Progress*, *The Fair Maid of the Inn*, *The Noble Gentleman*, *The Elder Brother*, *Love's Cure or The Martial Maid* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. The following might also be added to this group, although the problems involved in their authorship are great enough to justify their omission from such a study as this: *The Faithful Friends*, *Henry VIII*, *Sir John Van Olden Barnaveit* and *The Widow*.²

Group II is, of course, the one for our primary interest and includes all the material with which our study is closely concerned. Where other plays are introduced, it will usually be done to draw supporting evidence from them by pointing out their likeness to plays of Group II or differences from them. Suggestions may at times be hazarded as to

¹These subdivisions cannot always be rigidly observed, inasmuch as critics find traces of other writers than either Beaumont or Fletcher in (a): while Beaumont is granted by some a share in several of the plays under (b). The distinction follows the more conservative lines, however, and may be useful for our purposes without leading into misapprehensions.

²The lost plays, *Cardenio*, *The Jeweller of Amsterdam*, and *Madoc* will not be considered.

the striking characteristics of Groups I and III, but, in general, the effort will be made to keep well in the background all other plays but those selected for especial study, so that a distinct and unified impression of these may be gained. This course commends itself also for its safety; for while it is recognized that Fletcher probably had the guiding hand in most of the plays of Group III, there is always danger of unjustifiable inferences in tracing that hand until his method has been more clearly discovered from the plays in which he appears to have worked alone.¹

It must be confessed that most of the documentary evidence as to Fletcher's authorship of the plays of this second group is of a distinctly negative or non-contradictory sort, the only play adequately authenticated being *The Humorous Lieutenant*, of which there is a manuscript copy dated 1625 and declaring Fletcher to be its author.

The Wild Goose Chase is certified to as Fletcher's in the edition of 1652 by the actors Lowin and Taylor, who declare that they have seen it played before him with such success that he himself was forced to approve "the rare issue of his brain" and join in the loud applause. This would seem, on the whole, convincing testimony, but is not incontrovertible.

For *The Mad Lover*, Dyce² accepts Cockaine's declaration³ that it was Fletcher's, and for *Monsieur Thomas*, Richard Brome's statement in his address to Charles Cotton prefixed to an early quarto of the play. Later critics, however, tend to discount the evidence of the early versifiers and writers of dedications, prologues, epilogues, etc., as regards the authorship of separate plays.

In regard to *Bonduca*, *Valentinian*, *The Mad Lover*, and *The Loyal Subject* it is clear that they could not have been later than March, 1618-19, since Burbage, who died at this time, is named in the 1679 folio as one of the actors in each of the four plays. It seems probable, moreover, that they were not written before 1611, the time near which

¹While no organized discussion is attempted as to the relative shares of Beaumont and Fletcher in the plays of group I, this study rests to some extent on the theory that Beaumont's influence was dominant in them. The view is based on a comparison of them not only with Fletcher's exclusive group but also with the plays of group III. The striking differences between I and II and the equally striking resemblances between II and III indicate that the paramount influence in I was different from that in the later plays and that influence would, in all probability, have been Beaumont's. This theory, however, applies only in a general way and must be understood as being sufficiently elastic to allow for many qualifications and debatable details.

²Dyce ed., II, 7.

³Commendatory Verses, 1647 folio. See Dyce ed., I, 59.

Beaumont is thought to have left off writing: hence they may quite reasonably be assigned to the period when Fletcher was writing alone.

Rule a Wife and Have a Wife and *A Wife for a Month* were licensed by Sir Henry Herbert in 1624 and *Women Pleased* would seem, from the omission of Burbage's name from the actors' list, to have been later than 1619, but these dates prove nothing except the unlikelihood of Beaumont's having had a part in the plays, inasmuch as he died in 1605.

Herbert's Office Book¹ states *The Woman's Prize*, *The Loyal Subject* and *The Faithful Shepherdess* to be Fletcher's.² This evidence has always been received without question, but Herbert's varied statements about *The Night Walker*³ show that he was not always careful to record details of authorship, while his entries are at times too ambiguous to make dogmatic conclusions from them safe. Thus Dyce, following Malone, accepts as Fletcher's *The Island Princess*, *The Pilgrim* and *The Wild Goose Chase*,⁴ because the Herbert Manuscript states them to have been given at Court in 1625 and also declares it to have been the custom for all plays which Fletcher had made during the year to be performed at Court at Christmas time. This, however, would not be irrefutable evidence, unless it could be proved that no plays but his were given then, and that only such of his were given as had been written by him without assistance. Neither Malone nor Dyce makes any attempt to establish either of these conditions.

¹In Malone's *Shakespeare*, ed. Boswell, III, pp. 224-243.

²"On Thursday night at St. James, the 28 of Novemb., 1633, was acted before the King and Queen *The Tamer Tamed*, made by Fletcher. Very well likt."

"On Tuesday night at Whitehall the 10 of Decemb., 1633, was acted before the King and Queen *The Loyal Subject*, made by Fletcher and very well likt by the King." Ibid., III, p. 234.

"On Monday night the sixth of January (1633-4) and the Twelfth Night was presented at Denmark house before the King and Queene Fletcher's pastorall called the Faithfull Shepheardesse in the cloathes the Queene had given Taylor the year before in her owne pastorall."

[This last play is, moreover, certified to by various other testimonies.]

³"*The Night Walker* was acted on Thursday night, the 30 Janu., 1633 [4] at court before the King and Queen. Likt as a merry play. Made by Fletcher." III, p. 23.

At another point is this entry:

"For a play of Fletcher's corrected by Shirley, called the *Night Walkers* the 11 May, 1623, £2 0."

⁴Dyce ed., II, p. 281.

"It appears," says Malone, "from Sir Henry Herbert's manuscript that the new plays which Fletcher had brought out in the course of the year were generally presented at court at Christmas. As therefore *The Island Princess*, *The Pilgrim*, and *The Wild Goose Chase* are found among the court exhibitions of the year 1621, we need not hesitate to ascribe these pieces also to the same poet." Malone's *Shakespeare*, ed. Boswell, III, p. 225.

The Chances offers no clue to its date.

In view, then, of the haziness of outline which the subject still maintains, there is evidently much room for a study of this group of the Beaumont-Fletcher plays as a means of discovering Fletcher's distinctive dramatic method. If this can be clearly established it will not only serve to complete the chain of proof of the authenticity of the plays already generally granted to him, but will furnish aid in ascertaining his part in those plays to which his relation is more doubtful.¹

¹This latter task, however, is not attempted in this thesis, which undertakes only the exposition of Fletcher's method as shown in the plays of group II. The writer hopes, however, to present in a later study the result of the application of these tests to groups I and III.

III.

FLETCHER'S RELATION TO THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE LEADING FORMS OF THE DRAMA.

The Beaumont-Fletcher plays occupy so important a place in the general development of the drama that a word is necessary as to Fletcher's relation to each of its more important forms.

On the whole, Fletcher was not addicted to rigid dramatic forms. Lacking Shakspeare's subtlety in combinations, he was like him in the frequent mixture of his tones, and for that reason it is sometimes hard to determine what is meant to be the prevailing spirit of a play, and whether to classify it as comedy or tragi-comedy; or whether as tragi-comedy or tragedy. Fletcher himself, however, has essayed a definition of the chief dramatic genres, and we shall perhaps most easily arrive at his own classification of his plays by subjecting them to the tests which he establishes.

"A tragi-comedy," he declares, in the well-known introduction to *The Faithful Shepherdess*, "is not so called in respect of mirth and killing, but in respect it wants death, which is enough to make it no tragedy, yet brings some near it, which is enough to make it no comedy, which must be a representation of familiar people with such kind of trouble as no life be questioned, so that a god is as lawful in this as in a tragedy and mean people as in a comedy."¹

If, then, we follow these lines of division, assigning as tragedies those which contain death; as tragi-comedies those which bring some near death, and as comedies those which show ordinary people in the milder forms of distress, we shall have the following grouping:²

Pastoral (tragi-comedy)—*The Faithful Shepherdess*.

Tragi-comedies—*The Loyal Subject*, *The Mad Lover*, *Women Pleased*, *The Island Princess*, *A Wife for a Month*, *The Humorous Lieutenant*, *Monsieur Thomas*.

¹*The Faithful Shepherdess. To the Reader.*

²The folio of 1647 recognizes only comedies and tragedies besides the masque: that of 1679, however, includes tragi-comedy in its divisions, but does not always, in its classification, accept Fletcher's lines of demarcation.

Tragedies—*Valentinian, Bonduca.*

Comedies—*Wit Without Money, The Pilgrim, The Wild Goose Chase, The Chances, Rule a Wife and Have a Wife.*

The Triumph of Death and *The Triumph of Time*, if we attempt to classify them, would probably fall under different heads, the first being definitely a tragedy and the second a sort of morality-masque, if the phrase be allowed, and so to be classed alone. Coming then to discuss somewhat in detail Fletcher's adaptation of these types, we have first the pastoral drama.

(1) *The Pastoral Drama.* Although Fletcher by no means created the English pastoral drama, he did much to fix its artistic conditions. The realistic treatment is shown in Jonson's *Sad Shepherd*, where there is a distinct, and, in the main, successful attempt to get away from the artificiality of the early Arcadian models and present an actual outdoor life. Jonson is cited by Drummond as blaming Guarini because he "kept not decorum in making his shepherds speak as well as himself could."¹ In his own pastoral, too, Jonson avoids that snare, as well as its opposite, by a dialogue which is spicy without being either learned or clownish, while his plot is developed through natural and interesting situations.

Fletcher, on the other hand, conceived of the pastoral as artistically remote from actual life and even to please his audience would not make it "a play of country-hired shepherds with curtailed dogs in strings."² In this way he missed the more vital interest and reality which Jonson gained, but the justification of his method lies in the fact that the pastoral, if it follows all its earlier traditions, either of the Sicilian or the Arcadian sort, is essentially a conventionalized literary form and makes its appeal through æsthetic gratification rather than by a veracious presentation of life. The talk of the ordinary shepherd has its points of interest, but it could hardly meet the demands upon the pastoral for delicate poetic quality, while an elaborate plot would almost inevitably cheapen the species by carrying it over into the sphere of the ordinary drama. Just so far as Jonson ignored these considerations he departed from the true spirit of the pastoral.

That Fletcher felt this aloofness of the form is evident from the fact that in using it he adopted a treatment distinct in almost every point from that which he followed in his other plays. Not only does he introduce a different metrical scheme, but here, as nowhere else, he

¹Ben Jonson's *Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden*. Sh. Soc., 1846, p. 4.

²*The Faithful Shepherdess. To the Reader.*

subordinates the plot interest to subtler considerations and effects, keeps down his predilection for complications and conventions, except such as will harmonize with the central idea; and even omits much of the plot of his Italian source—*The Pastor Fido*,¹ which, in his search for material, would usually offer a strong appeal to him—all in order that he may obtain a simplicity of impression and unity of tone. That he also realized the small possibilities of stage effectiveness in the method which he followed is practically certain from his constant attention in other plays to stage success, as well as from the fact that he appears to have kept this play in its early form in spite of its utter failure on its first presentation. If such an inference is justifiable, *The Faithful Shepherdess* becomes interesting as apparently the only instance of Fletcher's fidelity to a high artistic instinct when it was weighed in the balance against stage success. What the play lost in dramatic power, however, it gained in progress towards a pure art form. Indeed, Fletcher may almost be said to have given the type its distinctive form in English literature, since Milton and others who have come after him have apparently accepted his ideal rather than Jonson's.

(2) *Tragi-comedy*. It has been the custom of critics to credit Beaumont and Fletcher with large importance in the establishment of the heroic romance on the stage and Thorndike² is suggesting no radical departure from accepted opinion in making this view the basis of his study of the influence of Beaumont and Fletcher on Shakspeare. The point to be chiefly noted in his theory, however, is its shifting of the earlier traditional emphasis; for whereas it has been the fashion to regard the younger dramatists as following Shakspeare and confirming a type which he had made popular, Thorndike maintains the opposite thesis, that Shakspeare was led to the production of his romances by the extreme popularity of the earlier efforts of Beaumont and Fletcher in this direction. To establish his point Thorndike investigates the chronology of Shakspeare's group, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest* and having shown that Beaumont and Fletcher were writing before Shakspeare produced *Cymbeline*, the first of his group, proves the probability of *Philaster's* having been of an earlier date than *Cymbeline*, and of six³ of the Beaumont-Fletcher romances having been written by the time that Shakspeare had written his three. He shows, too, by a search

¹The play is founded largely on Guarini's *Il Pastor Fido*.

²*The Influence of Beaumont and Fletcher on Shakspeare*. Ashley H. Thorndike (1901).

³*Philaster, The Maid's Tragedy, A King and No King, Cupid's Revenge, Four plays in One, Thierery and Theodocet*. Thorndike builds his thesis entirely upon these six romances, although he grants that others share in the qualities.

into the stage records of the time that Shakspeare and the two younger men were probably brought together during this period through their writing for The King's Men, and by the strong indications that Fletcher worked with Shakspeare on *Henry VIII* and on *The Two Noble Kinsmen* establishes some likelihood of a close association and of mutual influence. These probabilities having been presented, Mr. Thorndike undertakes a characterization of the heroic romance, including under that title non-historical heroic plays, such as have been cited in the two groups noted above. He distinguishes them alike from the chronicle histories, the revenge plays and other tragedies of blood, the classical and domestic tragedies and plays of any sort which are dominated by one interest or passion, as *Othello*, *Lear*, etc. He finds the most obvious characteristics of this class to be "a mixture of tragic and idyllic events, a series of highly improbable events, heroic and sentimental characters, foreign scenes, happy dénouements."¹ The combination of all these traits he takes to be a distinct departure from former models and a striking contrast to the realistic and satiric comedies and the intense unrelieved tragedies which immediately preceded these especial plays. Clearly, then, so he maintains, this exact type of romance was a departure from the prevalent dramatic forms, and, as such, was due either to Shakspeare or to Beaumont and Fletcher. Shakspeare, however, had been busy with tragedy and made a most abrupt change at just this time from that to romance, whereas Beaumont and Fletcher appear to have been from the first identified with the new type.² The likelihood would therefore be—especially in view of the extraordinary popularity of *Philaster*—that Beaumont and Fletcher had been the innovators and that Shakspeare had followed their example.

Thorndike's study is an interesting one and certainly masses a considerable array of probabilities to support the claim that Shakspeare was following the lead of the lesser dramatists. However, all these proofs can not establish indisputably the claim that *Philaster* preceded *Cymbeline*; and it cannot be established without the discovery of further documentary evidence. Until that is found it must remain an open question whether Beaumont and Fletcher or Shakspeare introduced this particular form of the heroic romance.³

¹p. 107.

²*The Woman Hater*, however, which can make no claims to being a heroic romance was brought out in 1607.

³M. W. Sampson in a review of Thorndike's study (*Journal of Germanic Philology* IV, 1902, No. 2, pp. 241-242) makes practically the same criticism as to the validity of Thorndike's conclusions.

However that may be, this, at least, is certain, that, along with Shakspeare, our two dramatists made of the species a permanent form, and that Beaumont and Fletcher, even more than Shakspeare, popularized it and established for it the particular lines along which it was to move. The type is, on the whole, more characteristic of Beaumont than of Fletcher—at any rate, more successfully wrought out in the plays in which Beaumont's collaboration seems sure. At the same time it is to be remarked that each play of this class in Group II was popular on the stage and that the great number of the same nature in Group III added to these, made Fletcher, certainly as regards the number of his plays, the chief representative in this field of the romantic drama. If he lacked some of the subtlety of Beaumont, he at least knew how to hold the stage here as elsewhere, and confirmed the standards and influences which their earlier and joint productions had initiated.

The principle of classification which Thorndike has laid down and which, for convenience, we follow, even beyond his six plays, would not admit comedies among the heroic romances, and hardly allows for heavy tragedy. For that reason the discussion of the type has been included under the head of tragi-comedies, although Thorndike has included certain so called tragedies in his group. Of tragi-comedies, four from Group II would be admitted: *The Loyal Subject*, *The Mad Lover*, *The Island Princess*, *A Wife for a Month*, and perhaps, through the serious plot interest, *Monsieur Thomas*, *Women Pleased* and *The Humorous Lieutenant*, so that practically all the tragi-comedies would fall here.

(3) *Tragedy*. The tragedies, of which there are two, *Bonduca* and *Valentinian*, would be excluded from Thorndike's class of romances by their lack of sentimental interest and of happy dénouements, although their historical themes need constitute no real difficulty in placing them there. This choice of historical subjects is rather a mark of Fletcher than of Beaumont, to whom no play using such a theme can be definitely attributed, and so it is Fletcher who may be thought of as marking a further step from the chronicle play than even Shakspeare had taken, because of his recklessness in dealing with historical material. Shakspeare had felt himself compelled to reproduce the ultimate and larger truths of history, however he might swerve from the narrow line of facts; but Fletcher, as a rule, felt no obligation to either the letter or the spirit and dealt with history in a fashion romantic in its freedom of handling, if not in its inclusion of all the so-called romantic features.

Thorndike finds in the Beaumont-Fletcher plays little influence of the tragedy of blood,¹ to which they are so close in time. He grants a possibility, however, of classifying *Thierry and Theoderet* under that head and finds a touch of their spirit in *The Triumph of Death*. He is clearly right in asserting that neither Beaumont nor Fletcher had an instinctive liking for sustained and exaggerated scenes of horror. Beaumont, indeed, had a sense of restraint which, even in his most powerful scenes, usually kept him within proper bounds. For Fletcher, however, the case was not so clear. *The Triumph of Death* might, for its unrelieved intensity, almost be Webster's, and *Valentinian*, with its accumulation of poisonings and suicides, is in much the same mood, even though the actual shedding of blood is not prominent. It is not impossible indeed that this school did influence Fletcher, although his many borrowings indicate that he was a constant imitator of Shakspeare, and, to a considerable extent, his disciple. Moreover, his own nature was too sunny and pleasure-loving to admit of any real preference for the highly wrought and abnormal tendencies of Webster and his school.² If Fletcher introduced violently tragic scenes it was not because his soul was aroused to the point of intensity which required them, as Webster's was, but because he was attentive to their effectiveness on the stage, and, when once engaged upon them, lacked what Schlegel calls "the artistic sagacity"³ to present any part of them by suggestion or by other of the subtler dramatic processes. This may be what Whipple means when he declares of Fletcher that "the same volatile fancy which in his comedy riots in fun, in his tragedy riots in blood,"⁴ but the inference from this of any real affinity for the horrible would be a hard view to defend.

(4) *Comedy*. In comedy it is clear that Fletcher is, in his own proper person, an epochal figure. The claim that he was the founder of the comedy of manners can hardly be maintained when one remembers the many Elizabethan and early Jacobean plays that might fall into such a classification. Neither can it be proved that he brought in the romantic comedy, for, besides earlier efforts, Chapman, Shakspeare and

¹*The Influence of Beaumont and Fletcher on Shakspeare*, p. 85.

²E. E. Stoll in his *John Webster* (1905) indeed makes a strong counter claim that Webster in his later years was in his comedy writing a thorough disciple of Fletcher and followed him as closely as possible in the plot making, characterization and atmosphere of the plays. See pp. 171-193.

³*Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, ed. 1889, p. 468.

⁴*Age of Elizabeth*, ed. 1889, p. 167.

Day all produced plays more or less of this type.¹ It was rather, indeed, by his skilful combination of these two, the romantic comedy, and the comedy of manners, that he gained his wonderful popularity and laid the foundations for his influence, an influence so great that it becomes a question whether any other writer of English comedy has done so much to settle its standards and shape its course. He himself was clearly affected to some extent by Jonson's peculiar type of comedy and handed on its influence to later dramatists, but he so modified and supplemented this comedy of manners in the processes of transmission that it emerged from his hands fully half made over. He shook it free from the didactic and sententious and breathed into it the infection of his own fun-loving spirit. He substituted, too, for the hard realism of Jonson's comedies a certain lightly adventurous tone which made all men soldiers of fortune and which, without in any essential way destroying its character as a comedy of manners, infused into it by the daring of the plots and the spiciness of the characters, a certain romantic coloring which doubled its effectiveness and charm. In some of the plays, like *The Woman's Prize, Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*, and *The Wild Goose Chase*, it is the spirit of the comedy of manners which is most to the fore, though the romantic element is by no means lacking, either in the conception of the characters or the contrivance of the plots. In others like *The Pilgrim* and *The Chances*, it is the romantic interest which receives the stronger emphasis, and it is to be noted that Fletcher shows in these an abandon and sheer delight in production that indicate his thorough affinity for his task.

His lightness of touch, cleverness of expression, readiness with expedients, variety of incidents and power to throw a romantic atmosphere around any number of absurdities of situation or character gave him the mastery in this less serious domain of his art, and gained for him a popularity not granted to Shakspeare or Jonson, however much they may have surpassed him in comprehension of human nature or weightiness of thought. In this way, while he borrowed much from his predecessors and had not an essentially original mind,

¹Courthope in his *History of English Poetry* (1903), IV, p. 437, has this to say on the subject:

"Of English poetic comedy there are only two kinds which have their roots deep in English character and institutions—the romantic comedy of Shakespeare and the satiric comedy of Ben Jonson; the one springing out of the ancient fabliaux, the other out of medieval moralities. In course of time a third species was formed by Beaumont and Fletcher, which combined some of the qualities of Shakespeare's style with others peculiar to Ben Jonson, but which was exotic in character, being in many essential respects an imitation of the practice of the Spanish stage."

he made the especial types of comedy which he adopted and his characteristic methods of handling them the models for many of the comedy writers of his day and became the father of a long line of dramatists which extended through the school of Congreve and Wycherley¹ and well into the eighteenth century. If the merit of the greater tragedies and tragi-comedies is coming more and more to be attributed to Beaumont, there is still left for Fletcher an undisputed right to most of the comedies on which their joint fame rests. On these his prime claim to pre-eminence will depend when the sifting of his work from that of his chief collaborator has been more fully accomplished. Meanwhile the discovery of the nature and extent of his influence—as distinct from that of Beaumont—upon the comedy writers from his own time until now is one of the interesting problems awaiting solution.

¹Courthope considers that the comedy writers of the Restoration formed their styles "from a combination of the style of Jonson and Fletcher," and maintains that they follow Jonson in all externals, such as dress, gesture and language, because he attempted the "closest imitation of life," whereas Fletcher handed on to them the Spanish method of treating plot and action. (See *A History of English Poetry*, IV, p. 445.) The influence of Jonson is, I think, visible in most of the writers of this school, in certain phases in their realistic treatment, but I should call it much less marked than that of Fletcher, who seems to me to furnish the real model by which they work.

IV.

CHOICE AND TREATMENT OF SOURCES.

Next after Shakspeare, Fletcher is, perhaps, of all English dramatists, the one whose sources best repay study as affording insight into his theory of dramatic writing. This results not only from his many and varied borrowings, but also from the very characteristic way in which he chose and handled this material. His method is the more clearly defined, too, from the fact that Beaumont appears to have usually invented his plots, while there are few plays either in Fletcher's own group or among those of Group III which have not already been traced, in part at least, to extraneous suggestion.¹ Moreover, the motives and methods at work in the adaptation of the material used in these two later groups are so nearly the same as to warrant a strong probability that Fletcher chose and shaped most of the plots of Group III. A tradition already referred to prevailed that Shirley assisted Fletcher in the plotting of several of his plays, but while this may have been true, the suggestion of the 1711 octavo² that Shirley merely finished several plays left incomplete by Fletcher is, on the whole, more probable. It seems clear that Shirley had a share in some of the late plays, but even if we grant his actual collaboration with Fletcher, it is hardly plausible that the older writer submitted his strong dramatic sense and more experienced judgment to the revisions of one who was obviously his disciple and imitator. We may then infer that Fletcher's hand is the guiding one in both groups, although our inferences as to his method must be based primarily on the plays of Group II.

In following up the subject of Fletcher's sources one soon becomes

¹Mr. Courthope is quite wide of the mark in being unable to recall any tragedy or comedy of Fletcher's—by which I take it that he means any play, though my comment holds in any case—in which the dramatist has not made the framework of his plot. (See *A History of English Poetry*, IV, p. 314.) If by Fletcher's contrivance of his own plots it is meant that he never accepts any without altering and supplementing it, that is of course true and would be found true of almost any dramatist. There can be no question, however, that he usually borrowed his main plots as well as the more important episodes which he used as supplementary material. *The Chances* and *The Mad Lover*, which are analyzed in this chapter, are both instances of his borrowing of the main plot.

²See Preface *Giving Some Account of the Authors and Their Writings*.

convinced that he had clearly defined ideas of what was worth borrowing and an ultimately consistent method of shaping that to the results at which he aimed. In every case his touchstone was the same. Through any mass of environment he detected the effective dramatic situation, whether actual or potential, and perceived with a remarkable degree of penetration how to detach it from useless surroundings and present it to the greatest advantage.

In his keen eye for what would serve his purpose, as well as in his freedom and skill in adapting it, Fletcher is strongly suggestive of Shakspeare, and yet the two differed radically in their approach to their material. Shakspeare, at least in his later and greater work, looked to his characters for the strong interest of his plays and was chiefly occupied in developing some central figure or figures through the medium of a suitable series of events. Thus, where a story offered him large possibilities in the way of character treatment, he did not greatly concern himself with its effectiveness *per se*.

Fletcher, however, came to his choice of material with his mind fixed on the interest of the plot, so that whether in tragedy, comedy or tragi-comedy, it was always the events which riveted his attention. For him the only successful plot was one crowded with happenings, while the characters were primarily the machinery to keep the plot in motion. In this way it comes about quite naturally that his plays do not centre about one great character or passion, but are rather a series of adventures marked by various slight but effective climaxes, which do for the reader repeatedly what most plays do only once, and all converge into the larger climax at the end. These high points of interest he looks for chiefly in his sources and often combines several stories to get the succession which he requires. The result is a framework full enough already to ensure the success of the acted play but sufficiently elastic to admit of the introduction of any further elements which will harmonize with the general tone of the play and conduce to the impression of constant activity.

(1) *Classical*. Such a view of dramatic utilities as Fletcher possessed made it natural that among all the materials of which he made use the Spanish attracted him most and the classical least. With the latter, indeed, it is clear that he had and could have had little affinity. One feels that Beaumont, of the two, must have been much closer to the classical taste and temper and it is not surprising that in at least two of his plays where the plots are borrowed the indebtedness is partly to classic material. Fletcher's only notable venture here, in

the plays of Group II, however, is in *The Triumph of Time*, drawn from Lucian's dialogue of *Timon*, and he is clearly restricted in the handling of his material, and, for once, unable to make the most of its dramatic possibilities. The aggravated didacticism of the motive, as well as the restraint of the classical simplicity, were obviously too much for his undisciplined volatility, so that the result is a combination of morality and masque, which, aside from certain scenic effectiveness, has little to recommend it and is distinctly inferior to the dialogue on which it is based.

(2) *Historical*. Nor was the historical spirit much less remote from Fletcher's than the classical. As already suggested¹ in noting his relation to the development of the historical play, he drew upon history merely as a part of the resources of his general dramatic fund and made no distinction between authentic and extraneous material.

Bonduca furnishes an excellent example of his method of plot building in plays of this class. In *Bonduca* Fletcher has combined historical data taken apparently through Holinshed² from Tacitus³ and Dion Cassius⁴ with suggestions from the play of *The Valiant Welshman*⁵ and possibly from Shakspeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*; and then has fully doubled the amount of material thus acquired, by the introduction of unhistorical incidents and interests. In somewhat Shaksperian fashion he has brought together the striking figures of Caratach and Bonduca—separated in history—and having chosen the battle as the dramatic centre of the play, has built his characters and minor situations about it. From the historic struggle in which Caratacus was captured by the Romans and the two later ones in which Bonduca engaged with the same enemy, he has selected such features as will combine into an effective whole, and to this end has represented both Caratach and Bonduca as taking part in the battle, although the former is the actual commander of the day. From the mere mention of the daughters of Bonduca as dishonored by the Romans and as appearing in battle with their mother, he develops a succession of stirring situations in which the daughters not only serve as an effective background for their mother's martial figure, but become invested through their own tremendous pluck and patriotism with a strong interest of their own. Thus in the temple scene they are shown only as a part of the

¹See p. 33.

²Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland. Raphael Holinshed (1586). ed. 1807. I, 489-490, 496-501.

³*Annales*, XII, 33-37, XIV, 29 ff.

⁴Dion Cassius, LXII, 1-12.

⁵*The Valiant Welshman*. Written by R. A. gent. London, 1615. Reprint, Erlangen, 1902. *Mucnschener beiträge*, v. 23.

picturesque setting, but in the one where they capture their Roman lovers and bring them into the camp to die they enter closely into the action of the plot. The great scene for them, however, as for Bonduca, is elaborated from the hint of the historian that Bonduca may have died by poison. In this scene the younger daughter pleads to live longer, while the older one shows all her mother's dauntlessness in her welcome of death.

The episode of Poenius grows out of the mention in the chronicles of a general, Pennius, who, repenting his disobedience to his commander, took his own life. With that as a basis Fletcher has developed the scenes of Poenius's proud resistance to the orders of his commanders, his eager watching of the battle from a distance, his suffering and shame in consequence of his disobedience, his final escape from his self-reproaches by suicide, and the elaborate funeral honors paid him throughout the camp.

The childish figure of Hengo is, according to Leonhardt,¹ taken from that of Prince Bald of *The Valiant Welshman*, although the differences between the two seem to me so great as to make the borrowing hardly more than the acceptance of a suggestion. The series of scenes, however, in which Hengo appears is attractive from first to last and shows a genuine pathos which Fletcher has nowhere else equalled. Moreover, the presence of a child in the camp gives a relieving touch that is distinctly artistic, while his incipient kingliness and heroism keep him from appearing at any time out of place or an encumbrance.²

The loves of Junius and Petillius for the fiery daughters of Bonduca serve the double purpose of multiplying the complications of the plot and affording touches of the comic. The scene has already been alluded to in which their lovers are betrayed by the patriotic maidens into capture and are saved from death only by the generosity of Caratach. The neglect of duty into which each is led by his passion and the resulting repentance and mortification furnish material for various episodes of serio-comic mood, which, however, are not always successful, since the situations involved are at times too grave, or even too ghastly, for jesting.

The other comedy element, introduced by Fletcher into the play, comes with the figures of Judas and his hungry companions, but the

¹*Bonduca. Eng. Stud.* (1889), XIII, p. 58.

²Mr. E. E. Stoll in his *John Webster* (p. 149) takes quite the opposite view of Hengo and calls him not only unchildlike but "a quavering milksop." The first objection seems to me to have some force, but I find no ground for the second. Both views on this question, however, are of course matters of personal impression.

effect of this group is even less satisfying than that of the previous one, since, Fletcher here, for once, puts into his soldiers a coarseness of nature and a vein of brutality that jar upon the tone of the play. The scene, however, where they are brought before Caratach with halters on their necks, their voracious acceptance of his hospitality and Judas's immediate threats upon his life, would doubtless have points of attraction for the pit, as would also the last scene in the play in which Judas lays his snares for Hengo and Caratach and brings about the death of one and the capture of the other.

Certainly Fletcher, by the skill with which he has shifted, developed, combined and supplemented his material, has produced a play that is full of highly interesting and impressive situations. It is true also that many of the liberties which he takes with his data are warranted by the privileges of the historical drama. At the same time the inevitable impression made by such a treatment of history is that the dramatist felt no concern to show us a real past, but only to construct an effective play. Jusserand,¹ indeed, is not far wrong in calling it a "tragi-comédie fantaisiste," although it has always been ranked as a tragedy and doubtless was intended as such by its author.

In *Valentinian* a similar purpose is apparent, although the historical outline, as Fletcher obtained it from Procopius,² is much more closely adhered to than the chronicles are in *Bonduca*. Symonds³ declares that Fletcher inverted the order of incidents by making Maximus's revenge the chief motive of the play and that the supplementing of that motive by a second one of revenge is an addition of Fletcher's own. Both of these motives, however, are implied in the narrative of Procopius, and it is rather in the insertion of numerous details and the general heightening of the dramatic value of the original than in any flagrant distortion of facts that the historical atmosphere and spirit are lost.

(3) *Italian*. When we come to the Italian and Spanish sources we are in the midst of Fletcher's real base of supplies. The question of his acquaintance with both or either of these languages is one so vexed and intricate that the writer does not feel justified in hazarding even a conjecture in the connection; for, although the investigation into the sources of Fletcher's plays has been a considerable part of the labor involved in this study, it has concerned itself more with the larger

¹*Histoire littéraire du peuple anglais*, II, p. 819.

²*Procopii Caesariensis Historiarum*. Tetrades I. Liber. III.

³*In Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, Part II *Procopius*. Bonnae, 1838.

⁴*Some Notes on Fletcher's Valentinian*. *Fortnightly Review*, XLVI, pp. 334-345.

features of Fletcher's dramatic handling of his material than with the close scrutiny of verbal details which is indispensable to a safe judgment on this point. The wide acquaintance with both languages among gentlemen of that day, and especially the evident breadth of Fletcher's own culture, make the inference that he knew both languages a natural one. Moreover, the preponderance of Italian and Spanish settings for the plays, and especially in the Spanish, the intimate and extensive acquaintance with the literature of the country, as well as the intermixture of borrowed words and phrases, point, though inconclusively, in the same direction. Mr. Rosenbach,¹ however, who has made a careful study of the sources of the Beaumont-Fletcher plays, is of the opinion that while Fletcher probably knew Italian, and undoubtedly knew French, he did not know the Spanish. He points out that available English or French translations of all the Spanish material used in the so-called Beaumont-Fletcher plays have already been discovered, except in the case of the plays, *Love's Cure* and *The Island Princess*. The former of these he thinks was not by either of the dramatists, but by Massinger. In the case of *The Island Princess*, while he has thus far found no version of the source except the original *La Conquista de Las Maluccas*, he thinks it easily possible that a translation of this may have circulated in manuscript in Fletcher's day, as frequently happened with other similar accounts—this being a time of intense interest in "Voyages" and "Relations," and nearly all the noted Spanish accounts of this sort being known to have been translated. Moreover, as mentioned before,² Mr. Rosenbach is inclined to attribute to Massinger a part in *The Island Princess*, and so would be at no loss to accept the theory that the Spanish original was used for the play, because all the indications point, as he thinks, to Massinger's knowledge of Spanish, and the transference of the material into English might easily have been made by him instead of Fletcher.³

The argument from the introduction of Spanish words and phrases into the play Mr. Rosenbach disposes of by a conclusion—based on careful study of all Spanish words employed in the plays—that in almost every instance the words are familiar enough to have been easily picked

¹Mr. Rosenbach has kindly placed in my hands the paper on *The Spanish Sources of Beaumont and Fletcher*, already mentioned on p. 24 of this study, and my statements as to his views are based upon that.

²p. 24 and just above.

³Mr. Rosenbach considers the Spanish influence upon Beaumont to have been slight if any and thinks it may have come to him indirectly through Fletcher, though it is hard to agree with this entirely when one remembers the strong influence of the spirit of the *Don Quixote* on *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* and the evidently dominating hand which Beaumont had in the latter play.

up. Moreover, there is in *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*¹ an instance of Spanish so incorrect as to be hardly recognizable, although the expression is a familiar one. This he takes as an illustration of Fletcher's lack of any real knowledge of the language.

To return, however, to our inquiry into the Italian sources which became our point of departure into the question of Fletcher's knowledge of the Italian and Spanish languages, there are of the entire group of Beaumont-Fletcher plays twelve² which have already been traced, in part at least, to Italian sources. Two³ borrow the entire plot, except for minor alterations; one,⁴ its general plan; three,⁵ the main plots; three,⁶ parts of the main, and, three,⁷ parts of the sub-plot.

Of the authors drawn from—either directly or through Belleforest on Paynter—Bandello is, so far as is known, considerably in the lead, since he furnishes material for seven⁸ of the plays. Boccaccio comes next, contributing to four,⁹ while Cinthio,¹⁰ Ariosto,¹¹ Tasso,¹² and Guarini¹³ have each apparently been borrowed from only in one play. As a rule, Fletcher draws upon Bandello for the more serious interest of the main story and upon Boccaccio for the episodes of the comic sub-plot.

On the whole, however, in spite of Boccaccio's contributions to Fletcher's store of comic plots, it was chiefly the stronger dramatic possibilities of the Italian material which constituted their attraction for Fletcher. The novelle—aside from those of Boccaccio and Sachetti—rarely possessed much of the comic interest so marked in the French and Spanish literatures of the corresponding period. Their settings, however, were easily adaptable to the romantic coloring at which Fletcher aimed, while the intense passions which they portrayed fascinated the theatric side of his imagination and made them as ready a resource for him in his tragi-comedies as the historical material was for his tragedies. There is, to be sure, only one play in this whole group where the Italian

¹The reading has been somewhat amended by later writers.

²*The Faithful Shepherdess, The Triumph of Love, The Triumph of Death, Monsieur Thomas, The Loyal Subject, The Mad Lover, Women Pleased, The Night Walker, The Knight of Malta, The Maid in the Mill, The Sea Voyage, The Lairs of Candy.*

³*The Triumph of Love, The Triumph of Death.*

⁴*The Faithful Shepherdess.*

⁵*Monsieur Thomas, The Loyal Subject, The Maid in the Mill.*

⁶*The Knight of Malta, The Sea Voyage, The Lairs of Candy.*

⁷*Monsieur Thomas, Women Pleased, The Mad Lover.*

⁸*The Triumph of Love, The Loyal Subject, Monsieur Thomas, The Mad Lover, The Maid in the Mill, The Night Walker, The Knight of Malta.*

⁹*Monsieur Thomas, Women Pleased, The Knight of Malta, The Triumph of Love.*

¹⁰*The Lairs of Candy.*

¹¹*The Sea Voyage.*

¹²*The Faithful Shepherdess.*

¹³*The Faithful Shepherdess.*

love of the lurid has full sweep—*The Triumph of Death*. Usually Fletcher's light-hearted optimism caught the potential horrors of the story before they were fully developed and guided them into a blissful termination, but he loved to bring his characters to the utmost verge of the terrible and then, by a whisk of fortune, to drop them safe into happiness.

The novelle were especially rich in situations that could be fitted to this treatment. Their vividness, picturesqueness and startling effects gratified Fletcher's dramatic sense, while he instinctively tempered their over-tragic bent. This tempering he usually brought about through some form of comic or romantic relief. Thus in *The Loyal Subject* the somewhat painful history of Archas is offset by the love story of young Archas and Olympia and by the comic complications of the disguise which the lover had assumed in order to be near his lady. In a similar fashion the serious interest in *Monsieur Thomas* is relieved by both comic and romantic incident, although here it is the comic sub-plot¹ which is added to contrast with the serious one, while the chief romantic interest is bound up in the main plot and borrowed from the source.

In still other respects than that of abating its natural gloominess of temper, Fletcher found it necessary to modify his Italian material. As a rule the plots of the novelle were thin, including few characters and interests and entirely devoid of that bustle and variety which constituted for him the prime desideratum in a finished play. Their plots rarely branched out widely, but followed simple lines, and usually centred about some great passion and its results. To shift this centre from passion to plot, and multiply interests through new characters, incidents and surprises, was constantly Fletcher's aim in handling his Italian material, as indeed it was to a lesser extent in any other case of his plot building.

The Mad Lover may be taken as, in most respects, typical of Fletcher's handling of Italian material. The story which forms the basis of the plot comes down from Josephus, through Bandello and Paynter, but was seen by Fletcher in one or both of its later forms. It concerns the love of a Roman youth, Mundus, who, becoming enamoured of a chaste and beautiful matron, Paulina, and finding his love unavailing, is brought to great grief and finally led by the help of a loyal slave to the accomplishment of his desire. The slave, alarmed at his master's distress, repairs to the temple of Isis and engages a priest to persuade the

¹The fact that the play is named for a character in the comic plot does not, as it seems to me, prevent the selection of the serious interest for the main plot.

virtuous Paulina that a god has summoned her to meet him at the temple and that it will be sacrilege to disregard the summons. The priest presents the claim so convincingly that both Paulina and her husband feel it her duty to go, and so, at the appointed time, she goes to the temple, is shrewdly robbed of her honor by Mundus and returns homewithout discovering the fraud which has been practiced upon her. Mundus, however, cannot resist boasting to her of his triumph and the thought of the wrong done to her so arouses her that she begs the Emperor himself for redress and brings it about that the slave and the priest are crucified, the temple is destroyed, the statue of Isis thrown into the river, and the lover—because for pity of his love, Tiberius softens his sentence—is sent into perpetual banishment.

On such a simple and gloomy tale as this Fletcher has constructed a play crowded with incident, and one which, while, by his own definition¹ ranking as tragi-comedy, has in it, from the first, much of the mood and movement of the romantic comedy. The scene has been shifted from Rome to the island of Paphos, so that a setting even more interestingly remote than the original, may be gained, while the stately Roman matron Paulina is changed into a Paphian princess, Calis, whose rank combines with her youthful beauty to bring her a succession of suitors and make her the centre of a variety of interesting events. The hero of the story is retained but thrust into a position of less prominence, while another suitor is brought forward who offers far greater possibilities for effective presentation—a general who, though invincible on the battlefield, is a stranger to all the social graces and absurdly clumsy in the arts of love. This general, Memnon, returning from war after a succession of victories, is seized with a violent love of Calis at first sight of her, quickly becoming mad over her indifference and threatening suicide. Even in the most distressing situations, so far as the participants themselves are concerned, however, the dramatist makes it clear that the terrible is to be averted and that his own attitude is that of distinct amusement. Thus not only Memnon's awkwardness in wooing, but his appalling proofs of his affection and the utmost phrenzy of his despair are given with a touch so undeniably comic that our thought is diverted from any anxiety. Mundus, the Roman youth, now appears as Syphax, brother of one of Calis's attendants and a soldier in Memnon's army. Being greatly distressed over his general's sad state, he goes to the princess to beg her compassion, but no sooner sees her than he himself is smitten with an equal passion and sets about winning her for himself, impossible as his own obscure rank makes an open and

¹This study, p. 29.

honorable attachment on his part. Two lines of activity are thus set in motion, but Fletcher soon introduces a third complicating force in the person of Memnon's brother, Polydore, who, full of grief at his brother's distraught condition, has set diligently about bringing Calis to pity. When he comes before Calis, however, he arouses at once in her a passion as ardent towards himself as his brother's is towards her, and from that time on she pursues him with her addresses in spite of all the repulses which brotherly loyalty dictate. These three passions, Memnon's, Calis's and that of Syphax, being set at work, the play is at no loss for incident or interest. Polydore and Calis continue to act at cross purposes, and the secret plot of Syphax and his sister Cleanthe takes up the line of the Italian story, though with many changes of detail. Syphax, like Mundus, hopes to win the lady of his choice by priestly connivance at a trick to decoy her to the temple and by the aid of his sister seems to have shaped events to the complete accomplishment of his desires. Here Fletcher turns directly from his Italian material, however, and instead of following its heavy tragedy lines meets trick with trick and turns the dénouement into a comedy which is not far from being farcical. This turn he accomplishes through the ingenuity of an entirely new character, Chilax, a clever old rogue with some loyalty to the princess, a good deal of common sense and a very strong sense of humor. Chilax learns from the priestess on whom Syphax and his sister depend, all the details of the evil plot and, determining that the trick shall return entirely upon Syphax's own head, brings to the temple the youth's deserted mistress, Cloe, and places her before him, so bedecked in bridal finery that Syphax at once takes her to be the promised Calis, is married to her without delay and sets out with her to beg the king's forgiveness for the presumption of so daring an alliance. The truth comes to light, a laugh goes round and Syphax is left to enjoy his jest as best he may. Meanwhile the constant efforts of his friends and the unchanged loyalty of his brother are bringing Memnon back to reason and leading him to the conviction that he is made for war and not for love. Thus, although Calis, moved by the generosity of both brothers, finally offers to be the wife of either, Memnon cheerfully renounces her to Polydore and determines to win new honors in war. So the play ends.

It should be noted, too, that in the amplification of his Italian plots Fletcher has constant recourse to dramatic devices and conventions, some more or less inherent by suggestion, in the main plot itself, though undeveloped; some borrowed from other Italian stories than those on which the main plot is based; some his own; and still others drawn from

the current Elizabethan supply, either through the medium of some earlier play or from a common stock where sources were indiscriminately mingled. He used conventions freely, of course, as we shall see later, in all of his plays; but he recognized the especial need for them in the handling of material in itself so lacking in elaboration and detail as the Italian was.

In general it may be said that Fletcher's way of treating his Italian material was to seize upon one or more stories as affording striking situations for the serious parts of his plays; to give the plot greater breadth and interest by the addition of new characters and consequent new motives and activities; to relieve the over-strenuous Italian tone by a contrasting one which was humorous or sentimental, or both; to use as many of the popular conventions as would fit into the structure of the play; and finally to envelope the whole in a romantic atmosphere which should soften the realism and, at the same time, prepare the audience, by a suggestion of remoteness from ordinary life, for whatever happened, however marvelous it might be.

(4) *Spanish*. If the serious character of the Italian stories proved their chief attraction to Fletcher, it is no less noticeable that he turned to the Spanish for the more lightly adventurous or humorous element of his plays.

The extent of the indebtedness of the Beaumont-Fletcher plays,¹ as a group, to the Spanish is proved by the fact that of the thirty-four plays whose sources are already known, either entirely or in part, seventeen² draw upon Spanish material. Moreover, since, at most, only three of that number, *Philaster*, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, and, according to Rosenbach, *The Little French Lawyer*, can be attributed to Beaumont as well as Fletcher, the inferences are in favor of Fletcher's having had the determining choice. Of the entire group, four belong to Group II, and so claim closer consideration than the rest.

One recognizes at once Fletcher's greater affinity for the Spanish material than for the Italian, not only in his larger use of it, but in the

¹The plays in which Spanish origin is doubtful are *The Coxcomb*, *The Queen of Corinth* and *A Wife for a Month*. The assignment adopted here is based chiefly on Rosenbach's conclusions, inasmuch as he has reviewed the work of previous students in this field and has then added the results of his own. He mentions twenty plays as possibly influenced by the Spanish, but indicates three as doubtful, thus reducing his more careful estimate to seventeen.

²*Philaster*, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, *The Little French Lawyer*, *The Custom of the Country*, *The Double Marriage*, *Women Pleased*, *The Chances*, *The Island Princess*, *The Pilgrim*, *The Prophetess*, *The Spanish Curate*, *The Maid in the Mill*, *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*, *The Fair Maid at the Inn*, *Love's Pilgrimage*, and *Love's Cure*, which Rosenbach thinks not Fletcher's at all.

ease with which he adapted what was taken over. It was closer in every way to his temperamental and artistic bent and to just the extent that his genius was nearer to comedy than to tragedy. It was less intense than the Italian, fuller of pleasing adventure and more genuinely romantic, happier and more buoyant in tone, and pervaded with a light-hearted and irresponsible spirit that was well in keeping with Fletcher's characteristic mood.

Of the authors drawn from, Cervantes is much the most used, ten¹ of the plays being apparently indebted to him, though there is some doubt as to two, while two² are from Cespedes y Mencses, and one each from Lope de Vega,³ Mateo Aleman,⁴ Leon de Argensola,⁵ Guillen de Castro⁶ and Lope de Rueda,⁷ or, rather, from a source based on his "Los Eugaños." The study of Fletcher's adaptation of material convinces me that of all those from whom he drew, Cervantes gave him what was best suited to his purposes. Indeed, if Fletcher had busied himself with writing stories instead of plays it seems probable that they would not have differed greatly from the *Novelas Exemplares*. It is true that Cervantes, especially when he shows himself at his best, as in *Don Quixote*, is vastly superior to Fletcher in his keen insight into human nature and his power to present it convincingly. Moreover, Cervantes's nature, although perhaps as cheerful as Fletcher's, had been tempered by experience to a realization of the seriousness of life such as Fletcher never acquired, and so the Spaniard carried under his gaiety of tone not only a more genuine sentiment, but a quietly sardonic quality which showed that he perceived the graver ironies, although he still remained genial, stimulating, and delightful. All these deeper qualities, however, Cervantes showed far less in his short stories than in the work by which he is best known. Moreover, his chief attraction for Fletcher is not so much in his outlook upon life as in the sprightliness of his invention and his method of presentation. The adventurous element of Cervantes's literary conceptions, their cleverness and variety of incident, their fulness of

¹*The Chances, The Knight of the Burning Pestle, The Coxcomb* (?), *The Custom of the Country, The Queen of Corinth* (?), *The Double Marriage, The Prophetess, The Fair Maid of the Inn, Love's Pilgrimage, and Rule a Wife and Have a Wife.*

²*The Maid in the Mill* (sub-plot), *The Spanish Curate.*

³*The Pilgrim.*

⁴*The Little French Lawyer.*

⁵*The Island Princess.*

⁶*Love's Cure.*

⁷*Philaster.* Rosenbach indicates some doubt in his own mind as to the source borrowed from, because *Philaster* is much less faithful in its adherence to any versions of the Spanish story thus far found than is usual in the Beaumont-Fletcher plays. He thinks another and unknown version may be the source.

interest and effectiveness of situation were all cardinal virtues in Fletcher's eyes—above all, the delightful maze of complications through which the lovers passed to final felicity. Such stories gave Fletcher the stimulus which his imagination needed and instinctively sought, so that he moved with absolute ease among the materials provided, and developed the ideas of Cervantes still further, at the same time that he supplemented by the Spaniard's greater creative genius traits which in himself were hardly more than embryonic.

The significant fact in Fletcher's use of Cervantes is that with him Fletcher follows his sources more closely than anywhere else, while such changes as are introduced serve rather to strengthen and elaborate the impression made by Cervantes's story than to create striking departures or additions. A rapid reading of *The Chances* and of Cervantes's *La Senora Cornelia*, on which the play is based, suggests that Fletcher has done little more than to dramatize the story. It is only on a closer examination that the various details of difference make themselves plain. Comparison of the two will make clear both the likenesses and the differences, although the comparison can hardly be a brief one, inasmuch as the countless turns of the plot constitute the distinguishing mark of both story and play. The play is, on the whole, the best example not only of Fletcher's dramatic affinity for Cervantes, but also of his more felicitous manner in plot building. Moreover, it is, in other respects as well, one of the most satisfactory and characteristic of all the plays of his especial group.

The story, as Cervantes presents it, is of two Spanish gentlemen, Don Juan and Don Antonio, who, while studying at Bologna, have become possessed of a great desire to see a famous beauty, the Lady Cornelia, who lives in extreme seclusion. Juan, wandering about one night, was suddenly accosted by a woman who inquired if his name was Fabio, and, receiving an affirmative reply, hastily consigned a bundle to him and disappeared. The bundle proving to be a newborn infant, Juan carried it with some confusion to his housekeeper, and, having ordered a nurse for it and a change of its costly clothes, returned to the street where it had been given him, to await further developments. Near the same house he found a gentleman being borne down by several assailants. He put them to flight, and, having lost his hat in the contest, was prevailed upon by the stranger whom he had helped to accept of his. Returning home he met Antonio, who told him that a little while before he had been appealed to by a veiled lady who begged his protection and whom he had brought home to his lodgings. At her request he had now come

out to render assistance to some one who was likely to be assaulted but whom he had not yet discovered. Juan explained that he himself had already probably accomplished the intended rescue and the two returned home, Antonio going in to visit the lady, while Juan peeped in upon her from outside the door. She, however, saw the flashing of the diamond in his newly-acquired hat, and, taking him for the Duke of Ferrara, urged him to enter. This he did, telling her, at her request when she had discovered her mistake, how he came to be possessed of the hat.

The housekeeper passing now with the child, the lady called to her to bring it in that she herself might care for it for the sake of her own child from whom she was separated. Then, being led to tell her story, she declared she was the Lady Cornelia and that the Duke of Ferrara had long been attached to her, but until now had found it impossible to marry her publicly. This very night, however, they were to have escaped to Verona together and there have been married. At the last moment her brother gave signs of having discovered their plans and her alarm had been so great that she had given birth to her child. The child, however, had been at once conveyed to the servant of the duke, in waiting outside, and she herself had followed soon after, expecting to meet the duke and proceed to Verona. In her distress at missing him she had come upon Antonio, who had befriended her by bringing her here. The housekeeper meanwhile had, at Juan's request, dressed the infant in its rich clothes, and when it was presented now to Cornelia she discovered it to be her own. It now became clear also that the nurse, in delivering it to Juan, had mistaken him for a servant of the duke, because in the confusion he had answered to the name of Fabio.

The next morning Cornelia's brother, Petruchio, not knowing of her presence in the house, calls upon Juan to acquaint him with the great wrong done his family name by the duke's dishonor of his sister and to ask help in demanding redress. Cornelia is filled with consternation at the duke's peril when she hears of the visit, but is comforted by assurances from Juan and Antonio, who both set forward with Petruchio in search of the duke. They soon come upon him, and, through Juan, whom he recognizes by his hat, the duke conveys to Petruchio assurances of his honorable intentions towards Cornelia and of his readiness to marry her at the earliest possible moment. All are soon reconciled, and when Antonio has explained Cornelia's hiding place they set out at once to seek her. Antonio arriving in advance, however, discovers that she and the child have disappeared in company with the housekeeper. He is filled with confusion, but takes heart on hearing

that one of the servants has a lady called Cornelia shut up in his room, and rushes in only to discover her to be a courtesan of that name. The duke, arriving soon after, meets with the same experiences and, becoming suspicious of the two Spaniards, leaves the house.

Meanwhile Cornelia has been persuaded by the housekeeper that her brother has carried off her protectors in order to get possession of her, and so she has let herself and her child be removed to the house of a curate in a neighboring village. The duke happens there one day soon after, having turned aside from his search for Cornelia in order to take a needed rest. The curate questions him carefully as to the cause of his obvious distress, then brings in the infant dressed in the jewels which the duke had given Cornelia and then, when he has astonished him properly with this revelation discloses to him Cornelia herself. The duke is, of course, overjoyed and sends off at once for Petruchio, Juan and Antonio to share in his happiness. First, however, on their arrival he pretends to them that since Cornelia is hopelessly lost to him, he has determined to marry a beautiful laboring woman, to whom he has once made secret promises. This, of course, angers Petruchio greatly, but the sight of Cornelia herself, presented as the low born beauty, disarms his wrath and the duke and Cornelia are straightway united by the curate.

Such a succession of adventures and misadventures would seem to have been devised especially for Fletcher's use and assuredly it did come nearer to meeting his demands than the material used in any other play. The same constructive principle prevails in both story and play—a chain of incidents regulated only by chance—while the reigning interest throughout is that of liveliness, bustle and suspense. But even with all this guaranteed, Fletcher's craving for complication and hurry was not satisfied and the steps which he took to develop the narrative into his play are interesting and highly significant.

In the first place he threw the whole story into action so that such parts as are there related by one person to another are, in the play, all put before the eye. He followed the large lines of the main action with some fidelity until the latter part of the play, but constantly widened it by the development of latent possibilities or by the introduction of new incidents. At the last, however, he departed from Cervantes in ways that directly contributed to multiplying the activity on the stage and to heightening the effect from both the comic and the spectacular points of view.

The first act has a constant shifting of characters and places and thus sets the pace which is kept up throughout the play. The changes

from the story are all inspired by the desire for greater complication and comic effect. These are brought about chiefly through the three characters, Gillian, Antonio and Vecchio. Gillian, the landlady of Juan and Frederick, is virtually Fletcher's creation since she figures only hazily in the original story as a motherly and amiably meddling soul. As the play presents her, however, she is the strongly comic figure of the entire group and her unflagging cleverness and spicy dialogue with John make her one of the most successful characters that Fletcher has attempted. The other distinctly humorous figure is Antonio, Petruchio's irascible friend, who is wounded in the early contest and who appears frequently throughout the play to give vent to his inevitable explosiveness and so increase the general comic tone. The scene where his wounds are being attended to and the one later where he rails at his unfaithful mistress, as well as the closing one where he arrives in hot haste at the house of Vecchio and is played upon by the irrepressible John, are all inserted to show him off in a strong light for the sake of making a laugh. In all, there are six scenes devoted primarily to his eccentricities, and the Second Constantia incident is evidently diverted into connection with him in order to justify his introduction into the main plot, while her lover, for the same reason, becomes a servant of Antonio, instead of being, as in the story, John's.¹ Vecchio's character is slightly foreshadowed by Cervantes in the kindly teasings of the curate, but the motive is so altered and extended in the play as to be scarcely more than recognizable.

The Second Constantia incident is, in the play, drawn out into considerably more than its short episodic value in the story, since it makes John and Frederick suspicious of each other, and the duke suspicious of both, besides delaying considerably the discovery of the First Constantia. It is elaborated, too, to include not only another figure of the courtesan type, but a group of revellers who would doubtless greatly enhance the effect of the acted play. The removal of the Second Constantia to another and gayer dwelling is also a shrewd device for increasing the movement of the play by sending the searchers from house to house and so providing a variety of experiences.

Finally, the substitution of the pretended magician for the curate is also a dramatic stroke, since it provides for livelier complications and furnishes an effective meeting-ground, in the last scene of the play, for all the various interests and characters.

¹Notice that the Juan of the story becomes John of the play, the two Cornellas both take the name Constantia and Antonio becomes Frederick—the Antonio of the play being quite another character from the one in the story.

But enough has perhaps been said to establish certain traits as distinctly characteristic of Fletcher in the choice and treatment of his sources. It is apparent that whenever he found material at all adapted to his ideals, he took little trouble to invent leading situations, but gave himself to the elaboration of those which he borrowed and to filling in the intervals with varied interests and activities. It is clear too, that, while the Spanish, especially Cervantes, were, of all his sources, the best adapted to his temper and aims and required the least fundamental of his changes, he was nowhere content to use his material without adding considerably to its *dramatis personae* and through them and otherwise to its motives and complications. His tendency to combine several stories into one of the plots of his play and to set that plot off by another equally full, as well as his constant resort to dramatic conventions for purposes of plot amplification, have also been suggested. Above all, however, and through all, one notes the sure dramatic instinct which guides him to material capable of effective presentation and the unhesitating freedom with which he adapts to his purposes all that comes under his hand—acknowledging no obligation to either historical or poetic truth so long as his visualizing sense is satisfied.

V.

GENERAL DRAMATIC PRACTICE.

It has been charged against Lope de Vega, who is commonly held to have created the Spanish national drama and who probably enjoyed the greatest popularity of any dramatist who ever lived, that he sacrificed "dramatic probabilities and possibilities, geography, history and a decent morality"—all, to a desire for immediate applause.¹ He himself anticipates the charge, and defends his position in a short poem entitled *El Arte Nuevo de hacer Comedias*, where he says: "I know that, although the plays I have written might have been better done in some other way, they would not then have obtained the favor which they have enjoyed; for often a thing gives pleasure for the very reason that it is against accepted laws. When I am going to write a play, I lock up my rules with ten keys and thrust Terence and Plautus out of my study; for truth is given to crying out even from dumb volumes and I write by the art which those invented who aimed at the praise of the multitude, whom it is but right to humor in their folly, seeing that they pay."² The sentiment of the lines is, with slight reservations, so characteristic of Fletcher that, in the absence of direct testimony from himself, it may serve as a sort of key to his method—at least as an introduction.³

There are indications in Beaumont's verses⁴ on *The Faithful Shep-*

¹Ticknor—*History of Spanish Literature*. Boston, 1891, II, pp. 307-8.

²*Obras no-Dramaticas de Frey Lope Felix de Vega Carpio*. In *Bibliotheca de Autores Espanoles*. Tom. 38, p. 230.

³The question as to the nature and extent of Fletcher's indebtedness to Lope de Vega suggests an extremely interesting and important subject for investigation, though by no means a new one, since the hint has been given many times before. The investigation is one not to be lightly undertaken considering the bulk of the Spanish dramatists' work and other difficulties involved, but no one who has read even a few plays from each of the two men can fail to be struck by the similarity in dramatic ideals and methods, and one cannot help believing that valuable results would follow a detailed study of the problem.

"Why should the man whose wit had ne'er a stain
Upon the public stage present his vein
And make a thousand men in judgment sit
To call in question his undoubted wit,
Scarce two of which can understand the laws
Which they should judge by, or the party's cause." Dyce ed. I, p. 234.

herdless as well as in the *Induction* to *The Woman Hater*¹ and throughout *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* that he had a considerable disdain of the popular taste. However that may be, Fletcher certainly by temperament, and apparently from the pressure of financial necessity, was led into accepting the applause of his audience as the ultimate standard of his art. That he succeeded in winning this applause as few other dramatists have done, is beyond all question to those who will follow such testimony as the Herbert MS.,² prologues, and commendatory verses³ afford, while the later accounts furnished by Pepys,⁴ Dryden,⁵ Langbaine,⁶ Geneste⁷ and others show how his popularity continued almost unabated for many generations after his death. That he accomplished this end, not only by ignoring the severer classic canons, but also by the frequent sacrifice of many of the fundamental principles of high literary art is a fact equally obvious on even a hurried perusal of his work. Jusserand, in the latest volume of his *Histoire littéraire du peuple anglais*⁸ explains the success of Beaumont and Fletcher as due primarily to their immorality, maintaining that they raised the treatment of indecency to a fine art and, in making it please by its own in-

¹If there be any among you that come to hear lascivious scenes let them depart, for I do pronounce it to the utter discomfort of all two-penny gallery-men, ye shall have no bawdry in it. . . . How it will please you is not written in my part, for though you should like it today, perhaps yourself know not how you should digest it tomorrow. *Ibid.* II, pp. 95-96.

²Showing not only the frequency but also the great success with which the plays were presented in and immediately after Fletcher's own day.

³The commendatory verses referred to are those prefixed to the 1647 Folio, some of which were written during Fletcher's lifetime, though most of them are later. Some deductions are of course to be made for the inevitable fulsomeness of such tributes, but the aggregation of praise in this case is certainly proof of Fletcher's great popularity. Shirley's note *To the Reader* in the first folio contains one of the most frequently quoted encomiums; it declares that this book (the folio) is "without flattery, the greatest monument of the scene that time and humanity have produced and must live, not only the crown and sole reputation of our own, but the stain of all other nations and languages; for it may be boldly averred not one indiscretion hath branded this paper in all the lines." The prologues are, for the most part, less valuable than the other tributes in the folio, but confirm the impression made by the others.

⁴*The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, M. A. F. R. S. Ed. H. B. Wheatley, 1893-6.

Pepys makes almost constant reference to the successful performance of Fletcher's plays during his own day, himself seeing three of the Beaumont-Fletcher plays to one of Shakspeare's.

⁵*An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668). "Their plays are now the most pleasant and frequent entertainments of the stage—two of theirs being acted through the year for one of Shakspeare's or Jonson's." Scott Saintsbury Ed., XV, p. 346.

⁶*An Account of English Dramatick Poets* (1691), pp. 208-218, show a large number of Fletcher's plays being still acted "with great applause."

⁷*Some Account of the English Stage from the Restoration, 1660 to 1830*. Continuous records show an almost unbroken stage popularity for Fletcher down to about 1750.

⁸II, 815.

herent qualities found their chief title to public favor. That such an element may have contributed to the success of the plays is likely enough, however lamentable the fact. There are always people to whom such an appeal is gratifying and the number of such people was perhaps never larger in England than in Fletcher's generation and those succeeding it. This explanation is hardly adequate, however, to account for the measure or variety of success which the plays met with. Besides it should be noted that many of the writers of the commendatory verses of the 1647 Folio and even Collier in his *Short View of the Immorality of the English Stage* praise Fletcher for his superior morals and purity; so that it seems clear that however we may regard him today, his own age and the succeeding one did not single him out as one of the chief apostles of indecency. Certainly his continued popularity through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries must have had a more substantial and genuinely commendable basis than that of obscenity; and in our study of Fletcher, as distinct from Beaumont, it becomes a question of high significance to discover the real secret of his popularity, and to measure his actual merit within the sphere of his art. How far was he justified by his aim—stage success—in disregarding the canons of literary taste and how much of real dramatic genius is left to him after all possible deductions are made for his faults? The problem is one which admits of more debate than critics are apt to allow. If Fletcher had fixed upon the highest literary excellence as his goal he might, on the ground of his many derelictions here be summarily dismissed as a failure; for while there is no infallible authority on dramatic proprieties and while the greatest of all dramatists broke the letter of Aristotle's rules at his pleasure, there, nevertheless, do exist certain fundamental principles as to proper dramatic construction and certain accepted standards of good taste and morality which Shakspeare held in respect, but which Fletcher set aside at his pleasure or convenience. It is not that he violated any of these grossly, except where the shallowness of his own moral nature was at fault, or that he treated any of them with intentional disrespect; but his attitude towards his art was characteristically lacking in real reverence and he yielded much to immediate favor which he owed to his future good name. It is inevitable, of course, that such flippant and ignoble conceptions as he possessed of his task as a dramatist should bar him from the front rank of the immortals; and yet, after all, he has on his side the invincible argument of success and that, too, in such overwhelming measure that it is clearly the critic's duty to judge him for a time by his own standard

and look in the direction of his aims in order to discover the sources of his power.

Courthope insists that a play is rightly judged only when it is read,¹ and that it is unfair to the highest order of dramatic genius to praise a dramatist merely because he pleases the taste of his time or that which follows closely after that time.² "A great drama," he says, "must satisfy two conditions: it must be written in conformity with the universal laws of art and it must reflect the characteristic taste of those for whose gratification it was first composed."³ It is true, of course, that no sharp line can be drawn between the requirements of the stage and those of the literary critic of the drama, and it is beyond all argument that a good play should satisfy the mind as well as the eye. The play which cannot bear the test of a quiet reading can, of course, never rank as a classic; and yet it is true that many plays which attract large and representative audiences and hold them intent throughout the presentation are completely ignored as serious literary values and hardly exist apart from the stage. They prove beyond controversy—if any controversy ever seemed needed—that a play may be entirely lacking in high literary quality, and even flagrantly culpable according to long standing dramatic traditions, and yet be able to attract and gratify people of various classes and grades of intelligence.

Obviously one of the first requirements for arriving at any just comprehension of Fletcher's genius and triumph is a realization of the natural differences between such plays as aim at permanent literary worth and those intended primarily for successful presentation. When once the reader has thrown himself into the attitude of the spectator, it is easy to discover countless features in Fletcher's plays that would tend to make them popular; for often those very traits which so vex and weary the reader become the chief sources of the success of the acted play.

One needs to remember, too, that even in our own critical age the average theatregoer does not carry with him the keen analytical zeal of the student of dramatic literature. Preparation and causation, climax and turning point suggest a technical knowledge of which he is guiltless and so long as the play proves continuously interesting and makes a pleasing impression as a whole, his demands are satisfied and he asks no questions. He comes provided too with a certain readiness to shake off the limitations of the actual and has learned to accept most conven-

¹*A History of English Poetry*, IV, p. 319.

²*Ibid.*, IV, p. 310.

³*Ibid.*, IV, pp. 201-202.

tions as stage necessities. His memory is not troublesome and he even develops a fondness for certain repeated situations, while the correspondence which springs up between them and his own mental states enables him to seize the implications of the dramatist readily and provides him with an enjoyment undisturbed by the necessity for effort. His morals become flexible too and he adopts an attitude of "specialized ethics" that makes him accept without a quaver situations and sentiments which in real life would constitute for him a scandal hardly to be thought of. In fact, he feels himself in another world and so long as the illusion is, in any way, convincing, is glad to have it so. Whatever touches his imagination or his sense of humor gains his approval and the combined appeal is irresistible.

We may easily believe that the audiences for whom Fletcher wrote were not radically different in their tastes and instincts from those of the present day. Moreover, such special preferences as they seem likely to have had were of a kind that Fletcher was peculiarly fitted to gratify; for they brought to the appreciation of his improbable plots, imaginations trained by the romantic plays of Shakspeare and they fed with Fletcher's constant moral indelicacy that taste for the questionable which developed steadily through the Jacobean and Restoration periods.

It is clear that Fletcher's task of pleasing his audiences was rendered easy to him in many ways. For one thing, he took his play writing lightly and had neither avowed theories to live up to nor morals to enforce. He belonged to no school—unless it were his own or that of Lope de Vega, in either of which the one law was liberty—and so he never learned the bondage of excessive reverence for principles, although he did not, like Lope, set himself in deliberate antagonism to any. He had indeed no definite attitude towards the classical traditions of the drama, although Spalding may not be wrong when he finds Fletcher's judgment impelling him at first towards the Jonsonian type of classicism, while his taste drew him towards the audacities of Shakspeare.¹ It is true that his culture and his associations had so far affected him as to make him incline indolently and half admiringly towards more than one of the artistic proprieties; but he was naturally an eclectic and he never held himself to any principle that irked him or failed to subserve his immediate end.

It is obvious, too, that this aim to gratify his public was yet further facilitated by the remarkable agreement between his temper and that of

¹*Beaumont and Fletcher and Their Contemporaries*. Edinburgh Review, LXXIII, pp. 209-241.

his age. It was an age wearied of the earlier Elizabethan ardors and blunted in its moral and artistic sense, when—as G. C. Macaulay has pointed out in a connection similar to this—the theatre had ceased to be the expression of patriotism and of the national life and had become the amusement of the idle gentleman and of such members of the lower classes as were not kept away by the Puritan disapproval of the stage.¹ It was an age, too, which except among people of definitely Puritanical tendencies was in no mood to be preached at, although it might be laughed at, if the laugh was cleverly contrived; above all, it must be entertained and amused. It is not strange then that, in order to gratify such tastes, Fletcher fell into the writing of romantic plays; since in them the element of adventure gave the stimulus to curiosity, while the large interfusion of the comic doubled the likelihood of their acceptance.

Coming, however, to a more minute search for the sources of Fletcher's popularity, it seems clear that every distinctive feature of his plays contains some element that would naturally contribute to the success of the acted play. Let us consider a few of them briefly:

(1) *Theme.*

The choice of the theme of romantic love was a felicitous one, besides being a virtual necessity in view of the character of the plays. It is found, to a greater or less extent, in every play of the group except *Valentinian* and *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife* and in ten of them is largely, if not entirely, the impelling force of the main plot. The lovers are taken through a bewildering succession of tribulations, which are occasionally grievous, usually comic, and often both, but which invariably tend towards the blissful consummation which the popular instinct demands. Indeed, this optimistic principle is followed so faithfully in the group of plays attributed to Fletcher alone and so largely in the third group that one is led to credit Beaumont quite definitely with the unhappy fates of Aspatia,² Evadne,³ and Euphrasia,⁴ and to suspect Fletcher of the moral evasion by which Arbaces⁵ is saved from the outward appearance of guilt and yet allowed the gratification of his sinful love.

(2) *Setting.*

There was much also in the setting of Fletcher's plays to appeal

¹*Francis Beaumont, A Critical Study*, pp. 186-188.

²*The Maid's Tragedy*.

³*The Maid's Tragedy*.

⁴*Philaster*.

⁵*A King and No King*.

to the taste of the time. His fondness for splendid effects is shown in the fact that a large proportion of his plays deal with kings or reigning dukes and thus necessitate royal audiences, courtiers and fine trappings of various sorts. Besides these, masques, processions, cathedrals, temples, music, flowers and countless other accessories contribute to the general impression of brilliancy. Moreover, the places chosen are usually suggestive not only of romance but also of especial scenic beauty. Indeed, Fletcher rarely failed to verify the half-satiric words of the *Induction* to *The Woman Hater*, "A duke there is and the scene lies in Italy, as those two things lightly we never miss."¹ Not that he ever really reproduces the distinctive atmosphere of the place—any more than he does the subtler national traits in his characters—but he does create a generically romantic tone which is not too highly specialized for adaptation to any *locale* and which contributes a necessary element to the large illusion attempted.

Then, too, the world that Fletcher created within this setting, while to a considerable extent imaginary, was peopled with characters sufficiently close to the usual range of moral, intellectual and emotional life to command the interest of an average audience. The very limitations which prevented his comprehension of the subtleties of life and character fitted him for presenting their more superficial, but no less popular, aspects; while the cheap morality with which he interlards his plays is entirely of the kind to satisfy the theatrical conscience. The sprightly dialogue too would constitute a steady source of gratification; for Fletcher is past-master in the art of clever nonsense and rarely, if ever, lets his speakers lapse into dulness. Moreover, this motley world has scenes for every taste, with its courts, its country and city houses; its life in the camp, at sea and in the forest; its views of madhouse and nunnery; its serenades, country festivals, morrice dances and countless other situations and varieties of human activity.

(3) *Conventions.*

If we continue our search for the elements of Fletcher's success into his methods of plot building and of characterization, we are confronted at once by a trait which, from the reader's standpoint, is entirely unpleasing and unpromising. Indeed, his fondness for the conventional is so extravagant and so marked that it becomes a question whether anything appreciable in the way either of plot or of character would be left if all such features were carefully deducted from his plays. And

¹Italy is, of course, to be interpreted in the broader sense, as any land of romantic tradition or beauty, as Italy, Spain, Sicily, etc.

yet, if we apply our principle of conceiving of the play as in action, it cannot be denied that Fletcher knew how to choose and use his conventions so as to make them directly contributory to his general purpose; and for that reason a somewhat detailed examination of them seems in place at this point. There could be nothing distinctive, of course, in a moderate employment by him of the more popular dramatic conventions, but his untiring and pre-eminently successful recourse to them makes his practice here of especial importance.

It may be well to say that the word *convention* is not employed here in its narrower and possibly more accurate sense as merely some marked departure from real life which is accepted as necessary or advantageous for stage presentation, but as including also any plot, character, motive, situation or dramatic detail of what variety soever, that by frequent usage has come to be looked upon as a commonplace of the drama.

The conventions may be conveniently considered under two main divisions: (a) conventions of plot and (b) conventions of character.

(a) *Conventions of plot.*

1. *Disguise.*

Disguise is, of all the devices to which Fletcher resorted, the one most overworked, and yet it is the one to which he owed most in the gay confusion of his comedies and the important complications of his serious plots. Thus in *The Wild Goose Chase* there are six disguises; in *The Pilgrim*, five; in *Women Pleased*, four; in *Monsieur Thomas*, *The Loyal Subject* and *The Mad Lover*, two each and in *The Island Princess* and also *A Wife for a Month*, one. In estimating the value of disguise as a dramatic device, the reader is apt to forget that, whereas it is all tediously plain to him, it is either not known to the spectator or else—what is more usual and vastly more effective—is understood by him but not by certain interested characters in the play. The double rôle begins to develop absurdities as soon as it is discovered by the audience. Indeed, one has only to recall the moment of such a disclosure in the acting of any play today to remember the immediate accession of interest which the situation creates and the responsiveness with which the audience follows the countless comic complications to which it gives rise. Even one clever disguise may keep a play bubbling with life and fun, while a rapid succession of them, as in *The Wild Goose Chase*, or a whole group of counter disguises, as in *The Pilgrim*, would raise the interest and absurdity to the last point of effectiveness. The humor of such situation was enhanced too in Fletcher's day by the fact that the parts for

women were played by men and boys and so a double piquancy was added. It is no wonder that Fletcher was quick to see the dramatic possibilities latent in such a device. It was his constant resource for his mischief makers, both the merry ones, as Juletta¹ and Thomas,² and the real villain, such as the robber captain, Roderigo.³ The favorite use for it, however, is in the gay intrigues of lovers, as with young Archas,⁴ Alinda,⁵ and Belvidere,⁶ where it is made to serve the purpose of their sudden or romantically passionate love—which is also to be classed as a convention and may be considered next.

2. *Romantic Love.*

As already suggested,⁷ the motive of romantic love is at work, in one form or another, in nearly every play of Fletcher's especial group. It is this which, by its employment of the other conventions to serve its end, gives rise to most of the adventures and complications of the plots involved. The most aggravated use of the motive in the plays of group II is in *The Mad Lover*, the plot of which has already been outlined in the discussion of Fletcher's handling of Italian material.⁸ There it will be remembered Memnon is first smitten with a desperate passion on sight of the beautiful princess and later his subordinate Syphax coming to beg her compassion for his commander is overcome by the same irresistible force, whereas Calis herself is soon afterwards seized with a passion equally precipitate and compelling when she beholds the brother of Memnon come to beg her mercy for the one so grievously afflicted. The fantastic exaggeration of the motive here is closely paralleled in group III in *The Laws of Candy*, where, in the fashion of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Philaster loves Erotia, Erotia loves Antinous and Antinous loves only his father, while his father loves only himself. A more restricted use of the motive is found in *Monsieur Thomas*, where Francisco becomes so possessed of love for Cellide that he is speedily brought to death's door by his efforts to conceal it and is saved only by Valentine's renunciation of all claim to her. Among other numerous instances in point Armusia in *The Island Princess*, Olympia and young Archas in *The Loyal Subject*, and Isabella and the widow Heartlove in *Wit Without Money*, may be noted.

¹In *The Pilgrim*.

²*Monsieur Thomas*.

³*The Pilgrim*.

⁴*The Loyal Subject*.

⁵*The Pilgrim*.

⁶*Women Pleased*.

⁷P. 59.

⁸Pp. 44 ff.

3. *Conversion.*

By far the most unconvincing of all the conventions used for serious effects is that of conversion, or sudden change in the fundamental nature of a character. It is evident that Fletcher frequently used it as a dramatic makeshift and compelled it to do duty where subtler processes were demanded by the laws of spiritual development. If a character was needed in two different rôles, he rarely concerned himself to evolve the second from the first, but brought the earlier one along in undiminishing magnitude up to a given point and then by some magical stroke caused it to disappear in a flash and substituted the other in its place. As is frequently the case with his devices, this is obviously done either to give rise to another set of incidents growing out of the unexpected change of spirit, or else to enhance the general impressiveness of the closing scene—as with Frederick in *A Wife for a Month* or Boroski in *The Loyal Subject*. Used for serious ends, however, the motive is invariably unsatisfying; for not all the vitalizing force of the acted play or the generally beatific processes of the last scene could reconcile an audience to these changes in which Fletcher would have us believe.

In Fletcher's comedies, however, which frequently tend towards the farce in type, the exaggeration of the motive becomes the chief source of its success, and the instance of the making over of Alphonso, the irate father;¹ of Margarita, the termagant wife;² and of Petruchio, the domineering husband,³ are all justified to an audience by the effect which they produce, if not by the chain of causes which lead up to the final result.

4. *Discovery or recognition of the lost.*

The situation of a child separated from its parents and later brought back to a joyful recognition is a favorite one in the Beaumont-Fletcher plays, and so it is in no especial sense distinctive of Fletcher. It is found, however, in two plays of his group—*Monsieur Thomas* and *The Humorous Lieutenant*. The motive derives primarily from the classical sources, but was frequent in the Italian novelle and so, mainly through this medium, became one of the popular resources of Elizabethan dramatists in building their plots. Sometimes, as in Beaumont's *Triumph of Love*, it is brought over directly from the Italian; while in others, as in Fletcher's *Monsieur Thomas*, it is woven into the borrowed plot. Thus the Plutarch story neither in the original nor in

¹*The Pilgrim.*

²*Rule a Wife and Have a Wife.*

³*The Woman's Prize.*

Bandello or Paynter gives any hint of Antiochus being thought other than the son of Seleucus, but Fletcher makes him a lonely youth adopted by Valentine because of his resemblance to a son lost years ago. Then, after Valentine has given up his betrothed in order to save the life of this youth Francisco, Fletcher is ready with the final compensation of the discovery that Francisco himself is the long lost son.

5. *Domestic quarrels.*

The penchant for domestic strife forms a counterpoint to that for romantic love; for the old themes of the hectoring husband and the virago wife were too popular to escape Fletcher's eye. *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*, *The Woman's Prize* and *Women Pleased*¹ all deal with such subjects and are among the most popular of the plays of Fletcher's group.

6. *Retribution, or the deed returning upon the doer.*

The device in every way most characteristic of the nimbleness and versatility of Fletcher's wit is that in which the trick comes back upon the trickster and the intriguer is outwitted at his own game. This serves the double purpose of equalizing the rewards and punishments and of keeping up the tone of activity and intrigue. Sometimes it is meant to set forth the more serious dramatic ironies, as in *The Loyal Subject*,² where Boroski's disgrace comes upon him at the very banquet which he had planned for the destruction of Archas; or in *A Wife for a Month*,³ where Duke Alphonso is restored to his reason by the very draught which was meant to cause his death and so, quickly displaces the brother who had thought to secure himself on the throne by the evil deed. Then again, it turns a serious plot into a comic one, as in *The Mad Lover*,⁴ where Syphax, in seeking to entrap Calis into marrying him, is duped, by a counter trick, into marrying his own deserted mistress, Cloe. The happiest use made of the motive, however, is when it is comic throughout, as where Petruchio⁵ is punished for all his schemes of subjugating his wife, or where Thomas⁶ is overtaken in his tricks upon his sweetheart Mary.

7. *Asides.*

It is always a dangerous thing for a dramatist to resort to the ex-

¹*Women Pleased* has the theme only in the sub-plot and even there it is less prominent than in the other two plays.

²IV. 5-6.

³IV. 4; V. 1, 3.

⁴V. 4.

⁵*The Woman's Prize*.

⁶*Monsieur Thomas*.

travagant use of asides, for besides the unnaturalness of the device, it frequently spoils the subtlety of a situation by overstating it, or even by stating it at all. This was a constant pitfall for Fletcher; and yet, on the other hand, the rapid movement and many turns of his plots made him look upon asides as a necessary guide to the spectator in following the action, while the steady stream of confidence between the actor and his audience was a species of incidental flattery to which the pit, at least, was not insensible. In all his situations of *double entendre*, as of disguise or deception of any kind, asides are a foregone conclusion. Thus in *The Pilgrim* and *Monsieur Thomas*, which abound in such situations, the largest numbers are found, although *The Island Princess*, in which the governor of Temata plays an extended double part, and *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*, in which two couples are working assiduously to outwit each other, also give many examples of its use. *Valentinian*¹ is perhaps the best play for the study of its more serious employment, since Lucina is being deceived during the earlier part of the play, while Maximus in the later acts is thinking upon revenge and secret ambitions and so is constantly leading a double life. As usual, however, Fletcher breaks down in his attempts at these graver effects, although he knows how to use the device most successfully for comic situations, as in the listening scenes in *The Chances*² and *The Wild Goose Chase*,³ which, with their running comment from the hidden observer, are among the most laughable that he has produced.

These are only a few of the devices to which Fletcher resorted for the filling out of his plots. Others are touched on elsewhere—especially in connection with his treatment of sources and his stagecraft—and various others are necessarily omitted. Such an excessive use of ideas not his own undeniably argues some lack of creative faculty, and yet it shows an equally undeniable cleverness in supplementing his limitations and a rare wisdom in selection and adaptation. Here as elsewhere Fletcher was a most discriminating borrower and while he may seem at first glance to have left no convention unused, he has proved his dramatic genius no less by his preferences than by his omissions. More than one of the popular conventions of his own day and earlier were either neglected by him or given slight emphasis, because they offered too little in the way of dramatic vitality and general stage effectiveness.⁴

¹See especially II, 2, III, 1.

²II, 3.

³II, 2.

⁴Mr. Thorndike in a private letter (April, 1905,) emphasizes what he calls "the modernity" of Fletcher's conventions, his avoidance of some much used by Lyly, Chapman, and Shakspeare, and his especial fondness for conversions and retributions.

Without Shakspeare's power to individualize the type strongly, in either character or situation, he knew how to utilize every dramatic possibility offered by either, and in the eyes of the spectator doubtless atoned for his lack of depth and subtlety by the skill with which he borrowed and adapted. He knew how to take away from his conventions the unnaturalness of set devices and to make them pass into the general structure of the play. This, to be sure, is not always true in his slighter and more incidental use of them, but in such plays as *The Pilgrim* or *The Mad Lover* it is very strikingly the case; for in both the conventional motives become the life of the play and its moving force. Indeed, as a rule, they enter closely into the action of the plot and serve not only to heighten but often to bring about the main complications and resolutions of the plays.

It is evident, however, that Fletcher's influence upon the drama was in this particular most injurious; for while he himself probably drew as much immediate advantage from the use of conventions as any other English dramatist, he helped to confirm a fashion which in less skilful hands developed into a simple abuse and, as such, characterized the drama for many later generations. Indeed, the very conventions which he chiefly favored persisted so long that if one reads *The Rehearsal* and *The Critic*, two satires, the first on the drama of the Restoration and the second on that of the early eighteenth century, the first impression is that both were written in direct ridicule of Fletcher's plays, although we know that Dryden is the chief target for the first, while Sheridan, writing more than a century after Fletcher, could have had only indirect reference to him.

In *The Rehearsal*, Mr. Bayes frankly acknowledges himself provided with "a book of Drama Common places" which, he declares, "we men of art have found it convenient to make use of."¹ In his comments on his play, as the rehearsal progresses, he proceeds to give the clue to many of these commonplaces which he considers effective. Thus his boast that the scene between Prince Prettyman and his tailor is one of "sheer wit" and "as full of Drollery as ever it can hold";² his repudiation of all the uses of a plot "except to bring in fine things";³ his injunction that the play must ever be interlarded with song if it is to appeal to "Pit, Box and Gallery";⁴ his warning that the heroine may

¹I, 1

²III, 1

³III, 1

⁴III, 1

be found "not dead neither"¹; his device of the prince being taken off when a child and brought up as a fisherman;² his hero's abandonment of his purpose to leave town because, as he was pulling on his boots, he suddenly felt himself passionately in love;³ the introduction of the funeral scene;⁴ and the declaration that the chief art of the drama is to "elevate your expectation and then bring you off some extraordinary way,"⁵—all these and various other thrusts in the play suggest how firmly the marks of Fletcher's method had impressed themselves upon the Restoration drama and to what absurdity they had come. Nor are the satiric comments and illustrations in *The Critic* less pertinent in their application to Fletcher's dramatic devices, though they follow too much the same line to warrant being quoted here. One must beware, of course, of attributing too much to Fletcher's single influence in continuing the various conventions which prevailed in his plays, and yet the fact that he, best of all, certainly after Shakspeare, knew how to use them effectively and the accruing facts of his sweeping popularity on the stage and his widespread influence over succeeding dramatists along other lines, make it more than probable that he, of all the later dramatists of his day, had the largest part in passing on the conventions which he himself favored most.

(b) *Conventions of character.*

Fletcher's method of characterization, as regards both choice and treatment, partakes so largely of the nature of the conventional as to warrant the insertion of most of the discussion of it at this point, although it involves the inclusion of some details not strictly germane to the subject of conventions.

With his conception of his characters as properly subsidiary to the action of his plays, it is not strange that Fletcher determined the temperaments and traits of the former by the spirit and necessities of the latter. Choosing, as he almost invariably did, plots with unusual and even unnatural situations, he inevitably produced for them characters of a correspondingly abnormal and highly emphasized stamp.

1. *Adoption of Types.*

Dryden was right, so far as Fletcher is concerned, when he said of Beaumont and Fletcher, "Humour, which Ben Jonson derived from particular persons they made it not their business to describe."⁶ At the same

¹III, 2.

²III, 2.

³III, 2.

⁴IV, 1.

⁵IV, 1.

⁶*Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, ed. Scott-Saintsbury, XV, p. 346.

time it is true that Fletcher's characters are not many removes from the species. He recognized its dramatic effectiveness and by somewhat enlarging its equipment and by slightly reducing the stress on the dominant quality produced, instead of the humor, the type—a species which escapes the ultra-narrowness of the Jonsonian figure and which, if in no sense more subtle, is yet somewhat less remote from the average individuals who make up society.

So far as the exaggeration of a single trait goes, however, a few of Fletcher's characters are too close to the humor variety to be described by any other name. The play of *The Humorous Lieutenant* even derives its name from the temperamental eccentricity of an otherwise insignificant figure, while Alphonso in *The Pilgrim*, Memnon in *The Mad Lover*, and Antonio in *The Chances* are remembered by us almost entirely for a single trait. The Folio of 1679 even makes some attempt to designate the humors of its *dramatis personæ*. In the main, however, the observation will hold that Fletcher's characters are not the embodiment of humors in the Jonsonian sense. We may well distrust any claim of close affinity between the classic, moralistic Jonson and the irresponsible and irreverent Fletcher. They were too different in moods, methods and aims for Fletcher to find it easy to adopt, without reservation, any of Jonson's distinctive practices. Not only was Fletcher's hastiness of execution directly against his attaining to the fineness of finish which marked Jonson's characterizations, but his whole theory of plot structure was opposed to Jonson's habit of making the action revolve about the characters so as to set off the prominent trait in each. Moreover, Jonson was, from his particular angle of vision, really concerned with the inner life of his characters, while Fletcher sought only the outward manifestation of this spirit, and even that only as a means to an end. Jonson's character studies are limited in scope, but deep and intense; Fletcher's are somewhat broader, but light and superficial; for he cares to see only the obvious, and constantly reminds us of Mr. Puff's words in introducing Sir Christopher Hatton: "You'll know Sir Christopher by his turning out his toes."¹

It is to be noted, too, in connection with Fletcher's adoption of types, that the resemblance in the plots of his plays favored the repetition of certain conventional figures, while the exigencies of the romantic drama in general required no wide range of emotional experience or elaborate differentiation along psychological lines among the characters chosen. Indeed, the sudden loves, sharp contrasts and constant sur-

¹*The Critic*, II, 1.

prises in which the plays abound demand the repetition of certain conveniently endowed personages who will harmonize with this particular world and not be likely to question its marvels. These figures are sufficiently varied from one play to another to meet the demands of the differences in the story, but resemble each other so strongly in their fundamental qualities as to fall easily under the head of types and to submit themselves to a somewhat elastic classification, which will be considered as soon as we examine the chief influences determining Fletcher's choice of his characters.

2. *Social rank of the characters.*

It has been the fashion to believe that Fletcher was distinctly an aristocrat in his choice and treatment of his characters, and had no sympathy with any layer of society below that of the leisure class, Dryden's well-known remark that they¹ "understood and imitated the conversation of gentlemen much better"² than Shakspeare has probably done a good deal to accentuate that belief. If, however, one studies Fletcher's attitude towards the various social orders carefully, he becomes convinced that there was no lack of interest in the lower classes, but that the higher ones offered him, in general, more advantages for the purpose which he had in view. Thus, the spectacular possibilities which a court setting offered were sure to furnish a definite attraction, while the leisure of the upper classes for amusement and adventure were almost a necessity for the fun-loving and romantic world in which his plays chiefly revolved. When once these conditions were assured, he loved to fill in, where it was possible, with a group of the socially obscure, and was quite as ready to draw attention to his plebeians as to those of noble birth. Thus Gillian, the hostess in *The Chances*, is, by all odds, the most interesting character of the play, while Syphax, a common soldier, in *The Mad Lover*, and a brother to the maid of the princess, is given an important part in the plot. It is natural, of course, that this attitude should be more perceptible in the comedies than elsewhere, but the host of background-figures everywhere—doctors, lawyers, tutors, citizens and their wives, country clowns, gay maids and valets—are all accorded sufficient importance to prove that, with Fletcher, rank was not a primary consideration, so long as a character had anything of interest to contribute.

3. *The principle of contrast.*

It is clear that, in the choice of his characters, Fletcher had con-

¹They meaning Beaumont and Fletcher.

²*Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. Scott-Sainsbury Ed., XV. p. 346.

stant recourse to the principle of contrast—to such an extent, indeed, that Schlegel's comparison of the plays to the sheet full of clean and unclean beasts let down to Peter in the vision is an apt, if not an elegant, description of them.¹ Thorndike calls attention to the fact that in each of the six romances on which his own study is based one or more good women may be found contrasted with one very evil one. In Fletcher's own group, however, six—*Bonduca*, *The Loyal Subject*, *The Island Princess*, *The Pilgrim*, *The Wild Goose Chase* and *The Woman's Prize*—are all lacking in any really evil-minded women, however slight their moral force may be. A more frequent form of contrast in Fletcher than that named by Thorndike as characteristic of the early romances is found in the virtuous woman who is tempted by the evil man. But in almost countless other ways the motive of contrast is constantly at work. Thus in *The Loyal Subject*, Theodore's hot-headed independence contrasts with the tame loyalty of Archas; Belvidere, in *Women Pleased*, is offset in her womanly devotion by the fickle and frivolous Isabella; while the love-sick Oriana in *The Wild Goose Chase* is counterbalanced by the maidens Rosalura and Lillia Bianca, as Mirabel is in other ways by Pinac and Belleur. So one might go on continuously throughout the plays, being always reminded of Mr. Puff's emphatic declaration, "Aye, that antithesis of persons is a most established figure."² The method is tedious enough to the reader at times, from its baldness and over-emphasis; but its advantage as a means of immediate heightening cannot be gainsaid, and there are many instances in which Fletcher has availed himself of its possibilities with great skilfulness.

4. *Borrowing of types.*

Dryden's charge³ against Fletcher that he appears to have borrowed every character except one—Arbaces in *A King and No King*—from Shakspeare, would be a hard one to substantiate, inasmuch as both authors made use of many of the stock figures of the comic and romantic drama. Mezières is, however, right in saying that Beaumont and Fletcher created no new type,⁴ for here, as elsewhere, they were apparently content to forego any claim to originality so long as their purposes could be accomplished without it.

5. *Choice of types.*

a. *The clever maiden in love.*

When we pass to an inquiry as to the types of character most

¹*Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, p. 470.

²*The Critic*, II, 1.

³*Preface to Troilus and Cressida*. Scott-Saintsbury ed., VI, p. 274.

⁴*Les Contemporains et Successeurs de Shakspeare*, p. 115.

prominent in Fletcher's plays, we come at once upon his favorite—the clever love-sick maiden. Indeed, there are only three plays—the two tragedies, *Bonduca* and *Valentinian*, and the comedy, *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*—which do not furnish their quota to his bevy of love-possessed maidens, and in almost every case they are clever.

There are minor differences, of course, in this numerous group of heroines. Some are more pronouncedly sentimental than others, and one or two¹ are lacking in piquancy and charm; but the almost unfailing mood is that of the merry, resourceful maiden who can at all times use her head to help her heart, and who welcomes a jest even at her lover's expense. This spirit always saves its possessor from the tameness which a complete surrender to sentimentalism would involve, and is the determining factor in the atmosphere of many of the comedies. Moreover, it is of decided advantage to the heroine herself, who, if misfortune comes, rarely spends her time in useless laments, but sets to work to overcome it. Belvidere in *Women Pleased*, Celia in *The Humorous Lieutenant*, Livia in *The Woman's Prize*, Mary in *Monsieur Thomas*, and Alinda in *The Pilgrim*, Rosalura, Lillia Bianca, and even to some degree Oriana in *The Wild Goose Chase* are of this type. Indeed, the figure is so distinctive a one in Fletcher's hands as to serve as a clue to his work in doubtful plays or parts of plays. On the other hand, we have in the plays of Group I disconsolate maidens² who, when fortune goes against their love, accept it meekly, without thought of resistance. To Fletcher's restless activity, such behavior would have seemed most unsatisfying, and the disasters which to Beaumont's Euphrasia and Aspatia seem irrevocable would for Fletcher's heroines have constituted only a stimulus to increased ingenuity. Beaumont's maidens take far deeper hold upon us by what Swinburne calls "the subtle pungency of their mortal sorrow,"³ but they lack the clever lightness and mental dexterity of Fletcher's heroines, and miss the charm which comes from the sprightly independence of these.

It is interesting to note, too, that Fletcher has shown himself, on the whole, more generous than either Shakspeare or Beaumont in the intellectual endowment of his women. He has little patience with their attempts at learning, but his Juletta, Alinda, Mary, Dorothy, Bianca, Maria and others show how he delights to make them clever even at the

¹Cellide in *Monsieur Thomas* and, to a less marked degree, Evanthe, in *A Wife for a Month*.

²Aspatia in *The Maid's Tragedy* and Euphrasia in *Philaster*.

³*Studies in Prose and Poetry*, ed. 1894, pp. 65-66.

expense of the men, and the wit and humor of the play more frequently turn on their contriving than on that of the heroes. Clearly, it was Beaumont who carried on the Ophelia type, while Fletcher continued that of Rosalind.

b. *The sentimental hero*, however, is by no means so striking a figure as the corresponding maiden; for he is usually lacking in her *verve* and breezy effectiveness. There are exceptions, it is true, as in the case of the madcap Thomas, but in most instances, when once the fatal passion descends upon these heroes, they are powerless to do aught but entertain it, while misfortunes make them droop as despairingly as Beaumont's heroines do. So, Memnon in *The Mad Lover* loses his reason because his affection is not returned, and all the scheming done in his behalf has to be carried on by others. In the same way, Francisco in *Monsieur Thomas* lies down to die because of his apparently hopeless love of Cellide, while Demetrius in *The Humorous Lieutenant*, for a similar reason, drops into melancholia, shuts himself up in his chamber and weeps without ceasing. Silvio in *Women Pleased* and Valerio in *A Wife for a Month* are more resourceful, but it is really Belvidere who wins the victory for Silvio, and Valerio does not always escape the suspicion of tameness. Young Archas in *The Loyal Subject* is more ingenious than either in following out his love for Olympia, but has not the piquant effectiveness of the maiden disguised as a youth.

c. *The clever scapegrace*.

It is plain, however, that Fletcher's favorite hero is not this mooning lover, but the light-hearted youth who, no matter how much he loves, will not consent to take life seriously. It is into characters of this type that Fletcher seems to put most of himself. They are freest in their movements and moods and so represent his most successful efforts. Thomas, Valentine, and Dons John and Frederick are examples of this class—irresponsible, companionable, burdened with no Puritanical proclivities, and, in every way, soldiers of fortune.

4. *The brave soldier* is a figure found with equal frequency in Groups I and II, and so is not especially characteristic of Fletcher. Moreover, in spite of all the popularity which his soldiers appear to enjoy, this is not one of his most successfully drawn types. It is true that Fletcher is fond of giving them a certain brusque frankness that becomes them, and a scorn of conventionalities that is productive of considerable amusement when the camp is exchanged for the court or the soldier becomes a lover. He furnishes them at times, too, with consid-

erable shrewdness, as in the case of Leontius in *The Humorous Lieutenant*; but the strong fibre of rugged manliness is—in spite of the social crudeness—almost invariably lacking, and so the character loses what should be its real appeal. Hardly any one of the soldiers of Group II is equal to either the Mardonius¹ of the first or the Norandine² of the third. Archas³ alienates us at once by the servility of his loyalty; Memnon⁴ is evidently weak-minded from the first; and even Caratach⁵ turns his best virtue into an abuse.

But the list of typical characters need not be continued. The chaste maid and matron, the clever servant, the testy gentleman, the merry old man, the evil king and his scheming favorite are among the number. It is manifest to the close student that the group of characters with whom Fletcher has peopled his plays have in them little of the human interest by which those of Shakspeare commend themselves to us. Indeed, if we think only of the meagreness of their natures and the narrowness of their outlook, the wonder is sure to arise that Fletcher could have used them successfully; and yet, if we keep to our guiding principle and judge by the standards of the average spectator, we shall find that there is not one of the types to which Fletcher resorted which has not its appeal to a popular audience even today—whether impossibly passionate lovers, deeply dyed villains, or whoever they may be. It is clear that where he could not create, he knew how to select with an instinct almost unerring.

This brings us once more, however, to the suggestion with which we began our search for the sources of Fletcher's popularity—that at every stage of his work he was guided by the immediate effect which the play would produce. Theme, setting, plot and characters were all chosen and presented with the same dominating end in view. Thus, in his dramatic economy there was no waste of energy or material, but each step which he took in the construction of his plays advanced him definitely towards his goal.

¹*A King and No King.*

²*The Knight of Malta.*

³*The Loyal Subject.*

⁴*The Mad Lover.*

⁵*Bonduca.*

VI.

MASTERY OF STAGECRAFT.

After all, the search for the sources of Fletcher's popularity comes back to the fundamental fact of his perfect comprehension of the mysteries and problems of stagecraft. He carried in his mind, as he wrote, the dimensions, limitations and possibilities of his stage, saw the play in action and the audience to whom it must appeal, and was guided in the construction of each scene by the immediate effect it would produce. The instinct was at work unfailingly in his choice of material for his plays, and not until his keen visualizing sense assured him that the plot contained a sufficient number of dramatic situations to insure the stage success of the play does he appear to have been willing to proceed to the task of actual construction. These being once made sure of, as a framework, he broadened the plot by such conventions and devices as would heighten the interest of the acted play, and there was hardly any such detail added which did not recommend itself to him on this basis.

Variety, continuous movement, and spectacular effects were the results at which he chiefly aimed in the staging of his plays, but he gained them, not by making large demands upon the resources of the stage itself, but by skilfully supplementing its limitations, so as to extract the utmost advantage from such possibilities as it did possess.

(1) *A varying stage-group.*

For producing the impression of activity and variety, there were many devices of which Fletcher made use. A constantly changing personnel for his scenes was one, and it is interesting to note the kaleidoscopic fashion in which his figures shift in any of his characteristic scenes. An instance of this is the scene in *The Woman's Prize*¹ which results from Petruchio's pretense of illness. The scene is in the hall of Petruchio's house, and begins with the entrance of his servants, Jacques and Pedro, who discuss the sudden illness of their master, with the result that Pedro rushes out for a physician. At this moment, Maria, the wife of Petruchio, enters the hall with other servants and excitedly

¹III, 4.

urges on certain packing necessary to her proposed departure. While that is in full movement, enter her father and a friend of Petruchio to inquire of her as to her husband's condition. After them follow her sister, her cousin and another of Petruchio's friends, all discussing his strange illness. Maria meanwhile insists vigorously that the disease is infectious, and that all who stay endanger their lives. As they talk, the watch whom she has sent for to attend Petruchio arrives, and Petruchio, roused to desperation by the strict confinement to which his clever bride has subjected him, calls out loudly demanding to be released. His voice reaches the group standing outside in the court, as he accuses them of starving and imprisoning him, and finally thrusts his arm out of the window to show the soundness of his flesh. At this moment, however, the doctor and the apothecary arrive, and the doctor, having taken the patient's pulse by an examination of the extended arm, pronounces him the victim of a pestilent fever, and orders copious bleeding to relieve the inflammation. With that he departs, and Maria, re-inforced by his grave declarations, finally persuades all the household to desert Petruchio, and goes out, leaving him in charge of the watch. Petruchio rages more loudly than ever now, demanding to be set free, and making such alarming threats that the attendants become afraid for their lives, and leave him. By this time, however, he has succeeded in bursting open the door, and rushes out, master of the situation and of an empty stage, and vowing vengeance on all concerned in his humiliation.

This scene might be paralleled in almost any of the comedies so far as the presentation of various groups and activities in a short compass of time and space is concerned. Indeed, the tragedies and tragi-comedies are not far behind in this respect, but the comedies are better adapted to such crowding, and invariably give good results, while the more serious plays frequently suggest a lack of repose. Fletcher has come nearer than any other dramatist to solving the problem of perpetual motion; for not only is somebody constantly coming and going, but everybody bound for any point whatever passes across the stage and stops long enough to tell his errand—whether servants on their way with messages, doctors bound for patients, truant husbands bound at last for home, or lovers going trysting. In this way every possible factor is made contributory to the general effect, while serving its especial end, and the impression of a larger cast of characters than really belongs to the play is created by the ceaseless activity of those employed.

(2) *The travelling instinct in the characters.*

The fondness of Fletcher's characters for actual travel is one of his favorite means of increasing the effect of motion. Some one is constantly preparing for a journey, setting out upon one or arriving home. Thus, *The Wild Goose Chase* opens with the return of Mirabel, Pinac, and Belleur from long travels, and throughout the play the talk is so continuously of their setting out again that we are never quite sure that the ground is not moving beneath our feet. In *The Pilgrims*, this seems actually true, for from first to last the chief *dramatis personæ* are wandering from home to forest, from forest to madhouse, from madhouse to forest, and from forest to cathedral. In *Monsieur Thomas*, not only are Valentine and Francisco represented as returned from one long journey, but Francisco sets out upon another and is shown as in the midst of it when he is intercepted by Michael and brought back. Thomas also is reported as just arrived from a long stay abroad. Silvio, in *Women Pleased*, wanders for a year, and we are made to feel ourselves more or less in touch with him during all that time. In *The Chances* the distances compassed are less, but the motion is almost constant, for there is hardly one of the turns of the plot which does not involve a scene of progress from one place to another.

(3) *Preparation for travel.*

There is frequent preparation, too, for journeys that never take place, for the advantages, as a comic motive, of a pretended or arrested intention to travel are sufficiently great to warrant the frequent use of such situations by Fletcher. The bustle and stir of packing, where servants rush confusedly about taking down hangings and garments and heaping together jewels, plate, linen, etc., are all immensely contributory to the general impression of movement, besides being highly comic in many of the incidental details.

The best of such situations in Fletcher is the one in *Wit Without Money*, where Lady Heartlove is making ready to leave town. This scene,¹ which is really contained in two scenic divisions of the play, and extends from the second act over into the third, opens with the entire establishment of the lady in consternation because of her unexpected announcement that she will leave at once for her country residence. The servants, Roger, Humphrey and Shorthouse—the last with only one boot on—all rage over the inconvenient vagaries of their mistress, who will post off without so much as an egg being ready in her country larder. As they talk, a fourth servant, Ralph, appears with the news that the carts have come, and that there is no one to load all

¹II, 5; III, 1.

the stuff lying in the hall. Meanwhile, the mistress herself shouts out angrily for help, and they all rush in to her assistance. Now Isabella, sister of Lady Hartlove, the widow, enters and pours out her indignation over being forced away from her new love, Francisco. She is by no means placated by the assurances of the widow, who appears at this point, and urges that it is being done for her good. Meanwhile, Short-house and Humphrey have made ready for the journey, and show themselves at the door prepared to mount and ride. Roger, however, follows just behind with the announcement that the departure is delayed by the arrival of a visitor, and in a moment Lady Heartlove, who has previously left the room, reappears in company with Valentine, the brother of Francisco. A violent infatuation on her part sets in at once, and she determines that the country visit must be abandoned. Isabella meanwhile has equipped herself for the journey, and, suspecting her sister's secret, is fired both by mischief and by a desire for revenge to urge an immediate departure. The widow, of course, has only subterfuges to offer for her sudden change of mind, and is powerless to appease the impatience of her sister until it occurs to her to offer to pay a tailor's bill of one hundred pounds. This offer Isabella reluctantly accepts, the horses are ordered to be unharnessed, and the servants go off in high glee over their escape from starvation in the country.

A study of this scene from first to last reveals the fact that, in spite of its constant hubbub and movement, there is nothing which presents any difficulties in the staging. Even the packing—which involves the only necessity for numerous stage accessories—can easily be conceived of as taking place out of sight, although the whole effect of confusion and noise is gained and the progress of the process is evident from time to time. The skill of the playwright appears in his ability to produce his atmosphere and results almost entirely through the activity of his characters, and not by reliance on elaborate or troublesome stage contrivances.

(4) *Rapid change of scene.*

But aside from the actual journeys, or the preparation for them, a considerable effect is gained in the plays by the rapid and numerous changes of scene. They are usually simple in kind, and not such as involve great distances; but they help to set the tone of the play by hurrying us hither and thither into a variety of locations and adventures. This is especially marked in the first act of *The Chances*, which includes ten changes of scene, and yet is so skilfully constructed that there is no wrench of the imagination, and the effect is entirely pleasing.

(5) *Abundance of domestics.*

A liberal supply of servants is of great assistance in the plays, since it facilitates such slight additions to stage furnishings as are needed during the progress of the action, and makes easy many turns of the plot that might otherwise offer difficulties. It furnishes, too, an unfailing supply of messengers, and, besides being quite in keeping with the gentlemanly world in which Fletcher's plays chiefly revolve, adds, by the constant goings to and fro, to the air of commotion which prevails in his dramas.

(6) *Interplay of groups.*

The interaction of two or more groups on each other is also one of Fletcher's favorite resources, and the ingenuity and skill which he shows in his various applications of the principle to his plays is one of the best proofs of his knowledge of stagecraft. The double group motive has several obvious advantages, since it not only enlarges by suggestion the compass of the stage, but brings into exercise the possibilities of the inner stage and the balcony, and is capable of being made most effective from both the comic and the spectacular standpoints.

For the comic use, the listening scenes are among the most successful. Thus, Mirabel, in *The Wild Goose Chase*,¹ watches the discomfiture of Pinac in Lillia Bianca's apartments, and comments gaily on his companion's sudden reduction to submission. John, in *The Chances*,² remains peeping at the door while Frederick goes in to talk with the lady Constantia, and the effect of John's envious ejaculations and of Frederick's constant anxiety lest John shall either hear his conversation with Constantia or discover his own presence to her, has all the elements of a comic situation. *Monsieur Thomas*³ has a similar scene where Thomas puts himself within hearing of his sweetheart, Mary, though out of her sight, and then pours out to a friend a story of pretended repentance which moves Mary to tears of joy until he inadvertently reveals his trick to her, and gets laughed at for his pains.

The same play gives a use of the device for serious purposes, as where Valentine discovers Francisco's loyalty to him by overhearing Cellide's offers of love.⁴ A scene like this is also to be found in *A Wife for a Month*,⁵ where Valerio becomes convinced of the steadfastness of his betrothed Evanthe. The motive is at its best, however, in

¹II, 2.

²II, 3.

³III, 1.

⁴III, 1.

⁵I, 1.

comic situations, though doubtless successful as a stage device in both the comic and the serious.

Another means of providing a double grouping is the placing of a part of the action indoors and the rest of it immediately outside. This frequently calls the balcony into use and thus gives the added advantage of height to one of the groups. Fletcher fully realized the scenic possibilities of a staging of this kind, and his plays abound in its use. Thus, as an instance, the window may be called the most important stage adjunct of his comedies, since it is at all times a great contributor to the sprightliness and picturesqueness of his scenes, and serves as an equally effective background for comic siege, parleyings, serenades and trysts.

One of the gayest scenes in the whole range of the plays is the serenade which Thomas gives his sweetheart, Mary, in *Monsieur Thomas*.¹ In this we get the full effect of the two groups. Thomas is down below with his fiddler, his servant, Launcelot, and his two companions, Hylas and Sam, while Mary and her maid, Madge, appear at the window above. The songs in the street are matched by others from the window, and a scene of high confusion prevails, to which Launcelot does full justice in the description which he gives of it later:

“The gentleman himself, young Master Thomas
 Environed with his furious myrmidons
 (The fiery fiddler and myself) now singing,
 Now beating at the door, there parleying
 Courting at that window, at the other scaling.”²

The central incident of the festivity, however, comes with Thomas's attempt to climb to Mary's window, while the fiddler is making music below. He reaches the top of the ladder, but being apparently dismayed by the sight of Madge disguised with a devil's vizard, and offering to kiss him, he falls to the ground and cries out loudly that his leg is broken into twenty pieces. At that, Mary is filled with compassion, and rushes down to relieve his pain. She sends all flying for help, but soon discovers that Thomas has planned the whole trick for the sake of being alone with her. Not to be outwitted, she pretends compliance with his wishes, but, dropping her scarf intentionally, begs that Thomas will recover it for her. While he is busy in the search, she slips past him into the house and up stairs, where she straightway appears at the window, reminding him how his jest has turned upon himself, and warning him to be off before the surgeons arrive.

¹III, 3.

²IV, 2.

(7) *Use of the balcony.*

The window scenes appear to have been connected with the balcony, but whether this was invariably true or not, it is likely that those involving the use of ladders, as in the serenade scene just cited, were always dependent upon this for their upper support. The ladder is a property of which Fletcher was naturally fond. In *Women Pleased*,¹ for instance, it is much in evidence, as Silvio, Claudio, and Soto all attempt to make use of one in scaling the wall of the fortress where Belvidere is confined.

The upper stage is of frequent service, too, not only in various other comedy scenes, but in the play-within-the-play, and in the stately and serious scenes of the tragedies and tragi-comedies, where it enhances the spectacular effect by the impression of height and throws one group into relief against the other.

The play-within-a-play is discussed a little later² in another connection and illustrations of its skilful use are given them. A striking tragedy scene where the balcony is otherwise brought into effective use, however, is the one in *The Triumph of Death*,³ where Gabriella throws down the bloody heart of Lavall to the Duke and his suite, and then drags the lifeless body forward into their view.

Bonduca, however, is the play which makes most continuous and effective use of the balcony for scenes of serious interest. Caratach and Nennius before the battle ascend the hill to view the advance of the Roman army⁴ and later, when the battle is on, Poenius and Drusus, watch its progress from some eminence in the background.⁵ There, in full view of the audience, but lifted above the army, Poenius expresses his hopes and fears. *Bonduca* and her daughters would appear here, too, as on the ramparts of the fort to which they had retreated after the Roman victory. The great scene of their death would occur here while the Roman army was massed on the larger stage below.⁶ The entreaties of Suetonius, the courageous refusal of *Bonduca*, the younger daughter's plea for life—indeed all the details of the scene would be doubly effective from the employment of the upper stage and would

¹I, 1, 3.²P. 81.³Sc. 5. (The inclusion of this play in the discussion of Fletcher's stagecraft seems justifiable here in spite of its being generally excluded from the treatment of his dramatic method. See p. 30.)⁴III, 3.⁵III, 5. Dyce indicates both these hills as on the side of the stage, but I see no reason for doing so except on the basis of modern staging. (See stage directions, Dyce ed., 1854, Act III, Sc. 3 and Sc. 5.)⁶IV, 4.

make an intensely dramatic impression. The later scenes in which Caratach and Hengo figure make equally successful use of the balcony. It is from here that Caratach watches the funeral procession of Poenius winding around the base of the rock where he and Hengo are concealed.¹ The admiration which he has for the dead Roman makes him forget all considerations of safety so that he suddenly steps forward into view and begs to have the body set down long enough for him to pay his tribute of respect. That done, the bearers go their way leaving him undisturbed for the present; although their discovery is to lead to his capture later. Meanwhile the child Hengo is suffering agonies of hunger and when later² they discover food which the ungrateful Judas has placed at the foot of the rock for a decoy, he begs that he may be let down by a strap to secure it. Caratach consents reluctantly and just as the child reaches the bottom of the rock and grasps the food, Judas gives him a mortal wound. The sight of this fires Caratach for vengeance and he hurls a stone at Judas that causes instant death. Then he slowly draws up the dying Hengo and mingles comfort with lamentation as long as there is a sign of life. Here on the rock the Romans take him and although he makes some resistance at first he surrenders when they promise Hengo an honorable burial. With that they descend from the rock bearing the body of the child.

(8) *The play within the play.*

On various accounts this device would have strong attractions for Fletcher and he was quick to adopt it when the need for diversion or festivity arose. The double grouping which it necessitated was of course a satisfaction, especially as the smaller play would, according to early stage traditions, occur on the upper stage. The masques doubtless offered the strongest appeal because of their spectacular setting, and we find them variously scattered in the plays. A wedding commonly called for one, as in *Valentinian*,³ *A Wife for a Month*,⁴ and *Women Pleased*,⁵ and in *The Mad Lover*⁶ Memnon is diverted from his raving by a hastily improvised masque of Orpheus.

(9) *Music.*

The constant and artistic use of music to be found in almost all of the plays is one of their great attractions, especially from the point

¹V. 1.

²V. 5.

³V. 8.

⁴II. 6.

⁵V. 3.

⁶IV. 1.

of view of an audience. Fletcher undeniably had a strong musical sense and showed it not only in the ease of his versification and the generally rhythmic structure of his lines but in the introduction of music at all points in the action. Often it is only the music of the instrument which he employs, because, as Mr. Puff remarks, "Nothing introduces a heroine like soft music."¹ Besides this, however, the plays abound in songs of every variety, from the borrowed ballad of John Dory² and the various other rollicking songs³ to the love lyrics,⁴ which are sometimes of exquisite beauty. The gay, light-hearted company that flit through Fletcher's plays are by nature a musical group and they drop into a song as easily as into a jest. Every play except *The Island Princess* and *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife* contains songs, and some of the gayer ones like *Monsieur Thomas* are dotted throughout with them.

(10) *Phases of realism presented.*

There are many other expedients by which Fletcher enhanced the acting value of his plays and adapted them to the stage of his day. Besides the more general contrivances there were various features that were sure to appeal to the taste of the time, being—as it was—far less sensitive to certain phases of realism than our own of the present day is. Thus he used freely both madness⁵ and drunkenness,⁶ which were then legitimate and effective subjects for comedy. Indeed, the mad-house scenes in *The Pilgrim*⁷ with their clever differentiation of types would have points of interest for an audience now, and were doubtless doubly successful with those for whom they were written. Scenes of pretended illness⁸ and death,⁹ too, would delight, no matter how realistically they were portrayed and even the one in *The Woman's Prize*,¹⁰ where Petruchio suddenly rises from his coffin to stop the persecutions of his wife, would not be too unpleasantly suggestive for high comedy effect. Funeral scenes in general were a favorite device of

¹*The Critic*, II, 1.

²*The Chances*, III, 2.

³*Monsieur Thomas*, III, 3, IV, 2, etc.; *The Woman's Prize*, II, 6; *The Chances*, V, 3.

⁴*Valentinian*, II, 5, V, 8; *Woman Pleased*, III, 4.

⁵*The Mad Lover*, *The Pilgrim*. Cf. also in group III, *Nice Valour or The Passionate Madman*.

⁶*Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*, V, 5; *The Pilgrim*, II, 1; *Wit Without Money*, V, 2; *The Humorous Lieutenant*, IV, 4.

⁷*The Pilgrim*, III, 7, IV, 3.

⁸*The Woman's Prize*, III, 4, V, 1; *The Wild Goose Chase*, IV, 3; *Monsieur Thomas*, III, 3.

⁹*The Woman's Prize*, V, 4; *The Mad Lover*, III, 4, V, 4.

¹⁰V, 4.

Fletcher's both for serious and for ultimately humorous motives. The funeral of Poenius in *Bonduca*¹ gives a striking instance of the first use in the way in which the cortège is made to appear and reappear in first one setting and then in another. The main one in *The Mad Lover*² is even more spectacular, with the temple and the courtiers for accessories, but its design is really comic and so it is in the end less genuinely impressive.

There are several interesting scenes which bring the common people into close contact with the court; one in *The Humorous Lieutenant*³ where the citizens crowd into the court to see the royal reception to the ambassadors of war, and another in *A Wife for a Month*⁴ where they come to see a masque.⁵ In both the impression is vivid—even in reading—of the rush at the doors, the condescension of the doorkeepers, the volubility of the citizens and their wives and the general behavior of the various groups. But aside from their value to us as pictures of the time; aside, too, from the interest which they doubtless aroused in audiences familiar with the conditions represented, there is much in the necessary staging of such scenes that would constitute an appeal to both the eye and the ear.

Coming back then once more to the leading thought of the chapter, the evidence at every turn makes it clear that Fletcher achieved his popularity by setting himself the test of the acted play and that in the selection of his material, the choice and presentation of his characters and in every detail and incident of his plots he wrote for the approval of his audience. That he had the stage manager's instinct so highly developed as to be well nigh infallible was in large measure the secret of the success of his plays, and since we have tested him thus far primarily by his own aims it is manifestly our duty now to apply to his dramatic practices the severer aesthetic principles by which literary critics judge. This application is the purpose of the following chapter.

¹V, 1, 2. It should be said that in the second scene the cortège need not be actually visible, but the effect of its presence is clearly given.

²V, 4, Cf., III, 4.

³I, 1.

⁴II, 4.

⁵Similar scenes in *The Maid's Tragedy* and the *Induction* to the *Four Plays in One* furnish interesting comparison.

VII.

TECHNIQUE.

When one has summed up Fletcher's dramatic theory and pointed out the chief traits and devices by which he gained the favor of the public, there seems little remaining to be said of his technique except by way of illustrating his cardinal principles as already laid down. Indeed, it seems hardly appropriate to apply so definite and uncompromising a term as technique to the structure of Fletcher's plays, because he proceeded largely without rules and apparently had no guide except a certain working basis or general attitude towards the art of play-writing. For this reason, any attempt to measure him strictly by classical canons will necessarily be unsatisfactory in the negative character of the results obtained. It is also true that such an artistic creed as he did possess can be arrived at only by inductive processes and was probably not clearly shaped in his own mind. At the same time it is inevitable that a dramatist should have some attitude towards the fundamental problems of dramatic construction and it may be worth our while to attempt, on the basis of his practice, some inferences as to Fletcher's theories on this subject.

(1) *The Unities.*

Dryden gave it as his verdict that "in the mechanic beauties of the plot, which are the observation of the three unities—time, place and action—they [Fletcher and Shakespeare] were both deficient; but Shakespeare most."¹ This is a just verdict, for while Fletcher did not observe any of the unities closely he was not a flagrant violator of the first two, at least. Indeed, he seems never to have taken them into serious account either for violation or for observance, but rather to have left them to shift for themselves while he looked to other demands which appeared to him more imperative. Beaumont in his verses on *Volpone*² expresses a deep respect for "the rules of time and place."

¹Preface to *Troilus and Cressida*, *The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy*. Scott-Saintsbury ed., VI, p. 265.

²"I would have shown
To all the world the art which thou alone
Hast taught our tongue, the rules of time and place
And other rites delivered with the grace
Of comic style, which only is far more
Than any English stage hath known before."

In his practice, however, he manifests considerable independence; and, indeed, Dryden, in making the comment cited above, had in mind plays in which Beaumont was apparently the chief worker. But whatever may be true of Beaumont, Fletcher announced no principle and in his own group of plays shows his practice to have been of a thoroughly flexible nature, although on the whole distinctly creditable to his artistic instinct and discretion.

(a) *Time.*

With his tendency to crowd one event upon another, it is natural that Fletcher should contrive his plays so that we receive the impression of an almost continuous action.

Of the various plays of Group II, *The Mad Lover* and *The Chances* are the only ones which come within the limits of a day and night, unless we include *The Faithful Shepherdess* and *The Triumph of Death*, both of which meet this stricter requirement. *The Island Princess*, *The Loyal Subject*, *The Wild Goose Chase*, *Wit Without Money*, and *The Humorous Lieutenant* obscure the time, perhaps purposely, in order to strengthen the impression of rapid movement. Others still, as *Monsieur Thomas* and *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*, require considerable time for the events which they include. In *A Wife for a Month*, at least a month is required, while in *Women Pleased* more than a year elapses, since Silvio must not find his riddle too easy.

In the tragedies Fletcher's practice was as free as in the lighter plays. Thus *Bonduca* extends over two days at least, since Suetonius' in the earlier part of the play speaks of the battle as being appointed for two days hence. The action of *Valentinian* suggests a much longer time than this, but the time-scheme of the play is not clear.

(b) *Place.*

Fletcher's attitude towards the second unity is as indefinite as in the case of the first. He varies his scene frequently, but he understands the art of transition, and so seldom introduces places remote from each other that one wonders whether he did not purposely abstain from the suggestion of great distances because he knew that the imagination of the spectator must compass them and so lose the effect of a compression of events. Some such motive seems more probable, although it is, of course, not impossible that he was governed by some slight reverence for the unities as classical requirements.

(c) *Action.*

The unity of action is of all the one which Fletcher must be

¹*Bonduca*, I, 2.

granted to have violated flagrantly, especially if the term is to be applied only in its more rigorous sense. Coleridge,¹ indeed, called the Beaumont-Fletcher plays as a group mere "aggregations without unity" and in an important sense the charge is a just one. Fletcher's plays especially are lacking in inner coherence and strongly vitalized relations; for he has neither the wish nor the power to single out some powerful personal center for his plays on which to focus all the interest of the action.

In the tragedies this is, of course, a grievous fault. Thus *Bonduca* has its dramatic unity in no human soul but in a very material battle towards which all earlier events tend with more or less directness and from which later ones result. *Valentinian* lacks the unity for another reason—that it has two heroes and two fully developed tragic actions instead of one. *Valentinian*, the emperor himself, appears first, rises to the accomplishment of his shameless desire, and pays the penalty for it by the hand of Maximus. Here the play should properly end; but the avenger now becomes the aggressor and brings upon himself a retribution as final and as just as that which he had inflicted on the other. From this results a double-headed tragedy which breaks all laws of artistic moderation and destroys all the dignity and unity of the play, although it must be conceded that the immediate interest of the action was doubtless enhanced by the procedure.

It is manifest that the same fault prevails in the tragi-comedies as in the tragedies, although the former may, as a species of drama, claim a much greater freedom in form, being essentially a hybrid which borrows its beginning and middle from tragedy, its ending from comedy and its spirit somewhat from both. For this reason one does not look to find its passions quite so overpowering or its moral law so inexorable as in tragedy. If, however, the inner life is less intense it should still be well defined, and all the events of the play should be brought into a certain relation to it. This Fletcher never really attained

The outward marks of unity, however, the tragi-comedies sometimes have. Thus in *A Wife for a Month* the structure is quite regular and the action simple and logical in its development. The two heroes—for the plot is really double—advance to a climax of misfortunes through the wicked machinations of Frederick and his favorite Sorano, but the retributive force which has been gathering from the first descends upon the evil doers when they feel themselves most firmly

¹*Lectures and Notes on Shakspeare and Other English Poets.* Ashe ed. 1885, p. 400.

established in power and, by humbling them, brings happiness to the others. *The Loyal Subject* is similar in structure, except that the fifth act is distinctly an excrescence on the unity of the action, which properly ends with Archas's restoration to favor. The play, however, is lengthened out to include a new series of events in which Archas subdues the rebellion raised in his behalf. The only unity to be found is in the general theme of Archas's loyalty, along which is strung a succession of happenings as various as Fletcher's ingenuity, working on the original story, could devise. *The Island Princess*, if it may be entered as corroborative proof, has much the same fault; for here it is Armusia who is made to serve as peg for the events of the play to hang upon, and the whole story of the Governor of Ternata in disguise is appended merely for the multiplication of the activities of the play. The personality of the hero does not dominate, but merely serves the interest of the plot and the looseness of design is fatal to its artistic effect as a whole.

When we pass to the sphere of the comedies, however, the lack of genuine centralization is so much less fatal that at times it appears to be almost an advantage. The variety of material introduced and the countless ripples of circumstance certainly militate against a severe orderliness of structure, so that the comedies would rarely lend themselves successfully to the compact and severely diagrammatic effects by which Freytag and Miss Woodbridge are fond of testing plays. They claim no bond of union in all their mass of heterogeneous details except the centripetal force of an organizing idea, but they have nevertheless, in most cases, an effective consistency of tone that Jonson with all his zeal for the unities does not exceed or even always arrive at. Fletcher's comedy plots are laid out with the utmost looseness so as to admit of the introduction of any variety of incident or character that will vary or multiply the activity; but no matter how extraneous to the leading interest they may appear, the various elements all obey the spirit in which the play is conceived and work towards the development of a unified impression. Indeed, Fletcher's chief ingenuity is spent in producing the greatest possible variety of situations that will emphasize this general effect; for he has usually borrowed his basal ideas and so is able to give his full energy and interest to the elaboration of effective details. Thus having found in Cervantes's story *La Senora Cornelia* the fundamental idea of chance, he exalts that motive not only into the title of his play but into the moving force of all its action, multiplying throughout both main and sub-plots whatever characters or incidents

will serve to illustrate this dominant principle. The result is a medley of happenings which to a casual observer may appear hopelessly unrelated but which yet carries with it a certain justification in the accomplishment of its aim. Nor can one quite justly blame the ingenuity which, in a play which is called *The Chances*, devises sufficient mischance to keep several groups in confusion up to the last scene of the play. So in *The Pilgrim* the dominating idea is that of a general chase. The confusion is endless, but it is intentional, and a certain unity prevails through all the complications and episodes, even when they are doubled by the disguise of most of the main characters of the play.

1. *Relation of the several plots of the plays.*

Fletcher's unwearying ideal of constant activity throughout his plays makes it natural that he should have introduced into their elastic structure as many groups as his ingenuity could in any way combine, and also that the several plots should at times not be clearly defined in their relations to each other. In both the tragedies the danger is avoided; for in *Bonduca*, although there are four lines of interest, the three minor ones all converge to the main one and bear upon one course of events; while in *Valentinian* there is only one slight episodic interest and nothing that may claim the proportions of a real sub-plot, although the main plot itself is composed of two successive and not inseparable actions. In the tragi-comedies the plan of construction is various. *The Island Princess* and *The Mad Lover* have one most important interest and such episodic details as are introduced are woven quite easily into the main structure. In *Monsieur Thomas*, *The Humorous Lieutenant*, and *Women Pleased*, however, there are two quite independent plots thrown together merely to increase the activity and vary the tone.

In the comedies both plans are successfully used. Thus in *The Chances* and *The Pilgrim* the subordination of all interests to one main action is quite definitely and skilfully accomplished; while in *The Woman's Prize*, *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*, *The Wild Goose Chase*, and *Wit Without Money* there are two lines of activity which could without great difficulty be separated from each other.

2. *Purpose of secondary plots.*

Fletcher's object in using the two or more plots in a play is various, although in no point unusual. It is always primarily, of course, for the sake of multiplying activity, but there are at least two other aims deserving of note. It has already been pointed out in the discussion of Fletcher's treatment of his sources, that he frequently added one

plot to another to furnish a contrasting tone. This would naturally occur most frequently in the tragi-comedies where a serious interest is demanded but must not be too intense. The comic plots in *Monsieur Thomas*, *The Humorous Lieutenant*, and *Women Pleased* are so used, as also the comic episodes of the tragedy *Bonduca* and the romantic sub-plot of *The Loyal Subject*. At other times the secondary interest is evidently used for purposes of intensification of the dominant mood of the play, as in *The Island Princess*, *A Wife for a Month* and the tragedy *Valentinian*. This motive of emphasis, however, is never successful in the serious plays; for although the play gains in compactness of structure and unification of interest, its final effect is unpleasing and inartistic because of the unbroken and exaggerated tenseness of its spirit.

In the comedies, however, the effect of the two plots upon each other is almost invariably successful, whether they are meant to intensify or to contrast with each other. Usually it is the contrast which is aimed at, as in *The Wild Goose Chase*, where the sentimental distresses of Oriana are offset by the saucy escapades of Rosalura and her sister.

Fletcher often uses the minor interests, too, to fill in gaps in the main one. Thus while Silvio¹ is travelling for a year, Isabella's gay intrigues are given us for diversion and while Francisco² is off on his journey, Thomas provides our amusement. In this way Fletcher brings it about that we have no sense of waiting for the travellers to return, but receive the impression of a continuous action.

3. Means of connecting the plots.

The devices which Fletcher adopts for connecting the groups in a play are usually the more superficial ones of kinship or of service, as in *Wit Without Money*, where the hero and heroine of the sub-plot are respectively brother and sister of those of the main, or in *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*, where Estefania of the one plot is maid to Margarita of the other. Flimsy as such connections appear, however, they are not disagreeably obvious in the play; for although Fletcher may fail entirely in establishing spiritual dependencies and subtleties of relation, he is too skilful a craftsman to neglect the outer links of dramatic connection and avails himself of every opportunity for bringing his groups together. Indeed, the characters themselves in their restless activity contribute greatly to this end; for by sheer force of

¹*Women Pleased*.

²*Monsieur Thomas*.

proximity and of continuous movement they naturally come into frequent contact. Moreover, Fletcher's instinctive love for a full stage makes him shape his plots almost invariably to that end.

(2) *Introduction.*

It is the established duty of the dramatist to indicate near the outset of his play, the time and place of the action, the nationality and environment of the hero and such other facts as are necessary for the comprehension of the events about to take place. If he is also able in the opening scene of the play to forecast its mood by striking its prevailing chord, the mechanic is held to have proved himself also an artist and the introduction is doubly effective. It is significant that although Fletcher is not deficient here in the definite requirements he rarely ever attempts the subtler and deeper effects. His lack of sensitive moral intuitions in itself prevented his successful presentation of these last in tragedy, but his craving for action made him apt to set aside in all his plays whatever might tend to delay it. To put before his audiences clearly, briefly, and with the least possible effort whatever it was needful for them to know was the task which he set himself and he welcomed few devices that did not contribute directly to this end. It evidently seemed to him the best economy, as a rule, to devote some time at the very beginning of the play to mere elucidation and so he almost invariably begins with a conversation in which the necessary facts are brought to light—sometimes through the medium of explanations to a returned traveller; sometimes through the talk of an angry man; and frequently by still other devices. Thus in *The Chances*, *The Pilgrim*, *The Wild Goose Chase*, and *A Wife for a Month* the larger part of the first scene is used for such an introduction before the main characters appear; while in *The Loyal Subject*, *The Island Princess*, *The Woman's Prize*, and *Valentinian* the main characters are not visible at all in this scene, but are presented entirely through the conversation of others. In *The Mad Lover*, *The Humorous Lieutenant*, and *Monsieur Thomas*, however, we come upon them almost at once, while in *Women Pleased* one, and in *Bonduca* both of the main characters enter into the opening conversation. *Valentinian* is perhaps Fletcher's best example of skilful introduction, but it has already been treated in some detail by Symonds,¹ and for that reason *Bonduca* is chosen as an instance here.

Caratach and *Bonduca* appear at once and in their talk show us the status of the war clearly and give us distinct impressions both as

¹*Some Notes on Fletcher's Valentinian.* Fortnightly Review, XLVI, pp. 337-340.

to their own individualities and as to the bravery of the Romans. A skilful touch is found in Caratach's high praise of Poenius that makes us acquainted with his early heroism and the glory he has brought to the Romans before we learn of the later pride and rebellion which might otherwise estrange us from him. Hengo, too, is well touched in with his few lines of brave childish prattle; and so by the end of the first scene we have before our minds, at least, all the important figures of the play except Suetonius. With the second scene we pass to the Roman camp and to all three of the sub-plot interests: the love of Junius for one of the daughters of Bonduca—soon followed by that of Petillius for the other; the hunger and consequent restlessness of the soldiers, especially of Judas and his band; and the command which leads to Poenius's disobedience and downfall. These three, with the main plot, which centres around Caratach and Bonduca, constitute the four lines of action for the play and with the close of this scene they are all ready to begin.

There is no sign of improper haste in Fletcher's opening scenes, unless the frequency with which the chief characters introduce themselves is so construed. The desire for definite activity is, however, abundantly evident and even these chief characters are rarely allowed to talk very long without doing something to initiate the action. In general it may be said that Fletcher bestowed little time on the actual introduction. A few skilfully contrived comments from others or themselves usually give us the cue to the important temperamental trait in each of the chief persons and its relation to their parts in the plot. That done, they are launched into action and our further enlightenment is left to the loquacity of all the *dramatis personæ*—a resource which is never exhausted. Everybody talks about himself and about everybody else, about his doings and theirs, and thus we gradually acquire a detailed knowledge of all. Indeed, it can never be charged against Fletcher that he leaves us in the dark about any thing; for such revelations as, by the exigencies of the plot, cannot become known through the medium of conversation, so inevitably take the form of asides and soliloquies that we weary of having nothing left to infer, and this too, in spite of the fact that Fletcher is not entirely ignorant of the art of combining surprise with preparation.

(3) *Surprise versus preparation.*

In spite of all Fletcher's elaboration of explanation, there are many of the larger turns of the plot for which we find ourselves totally unprepared. Nor is it greatly to be wondered at that the writers of

the romantic drama have frequently been guilty of the fault of inadequate causation, since the element of surprise is so large a contributor to the interest of their plays.

It is true that some of Fletcher's plays do not come strictly under the classification of the romantic drama and for that reason would seem to need other grounds of explanation for their delinquencies in this respect. And yet they are all—whether tragedies, comedies or tragi-comedies—conceived in the romantic spirit and governed by much the same laws of improbability and extravagance. Fortunately this is somewhat less marked in the tragedies than elsewhere, for in them Fletcher seems to have made a deliberate attempt at more careful connection and motiving; but the defects of his method were too fundamental in his nature to be overcome even in his most serious efforts. In the tragi-comedies and comedies the fault easily runs riot; for the sudden loves which seize upon their heroes and heroines at any time or place, militate naturally against orderly processes of development in either plot or character, and both plot and characters are frequently bandied about from one remarkable infatuation to another in a way that sets all probability at defiance. Thus in *The Mad Lover*, Memnon's sudden love for Calis gives one direction to the play, that of Syphax begins another, and her own for Polydore still another which is quite contradictory to both the other two. Passions so instantaneous and inexplicable would seem to admit of no preparation, and yet this is the type which Fletcher almost invariably chose.

It is true that a subtle analyst of character would have such surprises in mind from the beginning and would so endow his characters temperamentally and so shape the influences brought to bear upon them as to make even their most violent changes logically explicable, at least in the light of retrospection. Shakspeare is a consummate master here, for however much he may surprise us at the moment, he rarely, if ever, really outrages our sense of the possible. He sees straight to the centre of human nature and knows how to reconcile all its apparent contradictions by his view of its invisible workings. Fletcher, however, has none of this insight or power. His gaze stops on the surface and so he touches only the high-water marks of character and does not even look to the less obvious traits and tendencies. It is inevitable therefore that he should often bring us face to face with surprises of situation or of character to which our reason refuses to be reconciled.

It should be remembered, however, that apart from his natural limitations Fletcher never set himself the goal of careful dramatic

preparation but proceeded intentionally by the law of surprise. Here, as elsewhere, he acted upon his instinct for stagecraft, and having determined that surprises were more immediately effective than a gradual development, he adjusted his plays completely to that standard. In that way it became the test of his skill, not to construct a logical sequence of events but to lead up to a dénouement that would completely reverse all expectation. Such care as he took to establish a belief was apt to be expended with the aim of heightening the force of the surprise when the belief was overthrown; for he reckoned the result doubly effective if, at the proper dramatic moment, he could defy all probability and present a situation entirely unforeseen. It would be idle, of course, to attempt a justification of such a method on serious artistic grounds, but the probability is strong that it contributed to the success of the acted play. Once more we see the superficial student of life proving himself the supreme master of stagecraft.

It should be noted also that, in spite of Fletcher's failure to prepare for the larger issues of his plays, it is rarely the case that he does not make the smaller and more obviously mechanical connections smoothly, not only in the earlier processes of introduction, but in the linking of scene to scene. The same instinct which keeps his various groups in some sort of touch with each other looks to a certain external coherence in the forward movement of the play. Aside from the larger surprises, one scene paves the way for another and the action moves along without friction. Indeed, in censuring Fletcher for grave and evident faults we are apt to overlook the ease of his general method—an ease, however, which is never to be understood as including a delicate finish of details, but merely as the natural outcome of his gift for dramatic construction.

(4) *The closing scene.*

It is hardly to be wondered at, in view of Fletcher's aims, that however much this scene may fail in the strong elements of the dramatic, it is never deficient in the spectacular. Indeed, although it seems very important to Fletcher to diffuse activity and excitement throughout his plays, the final scene is invariably the one towards which all his best resources tend. Disguises are then stripped off; usurped kingdoms restored; lost husbands, wives, and children brought back; wrong doers are exposed, repent and are forgiven; virtue receives its reward; and love its consummation—in fact, all available conventions are put into active use, as many as are practicable are com-

bined in a single play, and each is used to the greatest advantage for immediate effect.

One gets the impression, however, that apart from his love of the spectacular and his fondness for creating surprises, Fletcher's eagerness to finish his play was also at work in this final massing of wonders. The impression is re-inforced, too, by Langbaine's account¹ of his hasty method of completing a play; so it would seem a safe inference that he initiated the lines of his action somewhat carefully, but that wearying in his labor he brought them all together, dealt out to each character or situation the convention best suited to its needs, heightened all effects indiscriminately and brought the play to an end.

(5) *The element of conflict.*

If we accept Freytag's definition of dramatic action²—using drama, however, in the single sense of tragedy, since Freytag's conception really includes only that of "a grand and passionately moved soul striving to express itself in action," and if, as he maintains, the supreme duty of the dramatist is to portray "the effect of some happening upon a human soul," it is easily apparent that Fletcher had no genuine tragedies and failed entirely in his real mission. Nor can Miss Woodbridge's³ tests be applied with greater success, since she declares the only truly tragic figure to be "a strong but imperfect individuality carrying on a losing struggle with the overpowering forces of life," and calls that figure the most tragic who unites in his own soul the opposing forces in the struggle.⁵ It is evident that Fletcher has no character within the entire range of his plays who can lay claim to this title or interest. Freytag and Miss Woodbridge, to be sure, are both narrow in their views as to what is genuinely dramatic, for their definitions not only shut out all but tragedy but even exclude some good plays of that class. At the same time, it is true that most of the greatest tragedies have involved deep spiritual conflict in the

¹"As to his failing in the two last acts (a fault Cicero sometimes alludes to and blames in an idle poet) it's more to be imputed to his laziness than his want of judgment. I have either read or been inform'd (I know not well whether) that 'twas generally Mr. Fletcher's practice after he had finished three acts of a play to show them to the actors and when they had agreed on terms he huddled up the two last without that care that behooved him." *An Account of English Dramatick Poets*, p. 144.

²*Die Technik des Dramas*, Auf. 1876, S. 18. "Ein groszartig und leidenschaftlich bewegtes Innere, welches danach ringt, sich in die That umzusetzen."

³*Ibid.*, S. 16. "Nicht die Darstellung einer Begebenheit an sich, sondern ihres Reflexe auf die Menschenseele ist Aufgabe der dramatischen Kunst."

⁴*The Drama, Its Law and Technique*, p. 36.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 39.

breast of the hero and so it is hardly amiss to measure Fletcher by such a standard.

It is obvious enough that Fletcher's whole moral endowment was against the portrayal of the tragic life. He lacked the seriousness and spiritual poise which could conceive and work out a deep inner experience, moving in response to fundamental laws; for his own outlook upon life was essentially unmoral and he substituted impulse for the higher and nobler motives. Granting his characters no general sense of moral obligation, he could make no exactions of them on the basis of their convictions of right and so he laid no foundations for a conflict of duty and desire. To him life was no struggle and he naturally could not project into his characters a world view and a moral force of which he himself was incapable. This shallowness of his own nature, which shut him off from the comprehension of spiritual mysteries, conspired easily then with his dramatic theory to make even his tragedies rather a mass of happenings than, in any real sense, studies of the soul.

Bonduca furnishes an illustration of this defect; *Caratach*, its leading figure, is a well poised, well mannered gentleman whom nothing seriously disturbs. Indeed, if we except a certain highly developed tendency on his part to berate *Bonduca* and her daughters, he shows at all times a faultlessness of behavior and a sublimity of self-command that preclude all idea of conflict and arouse a certain impatience in the reader. There is real dignity in the fundamental conception of his character, but none of the power which comes with the subduing of evil, for he apparently had no impulses but those born of unquestioning nobility. The excessive military courtesy, too, which Fletcher metes out to his generals falls to *Caratach* in double measure, and however commendable it may be on high moral grounds palls upon us distinctly as it accumulates throughout the play. When, at the last, it deprives us of the proper tragic catastrophe and sends *Caratach* off in highly optimistic mood to grace the triumph of his hospitable enemy *Suetonius* we cannot resist the conviction that if he had been a Briton of the proper spirit, he would have died fighting, or else have followed the example of *Bonduca* in taking his own life, rather than submit to the ignominy of capture.

The same ineffectiveness is seen in *Armusia*, who certainly shows enough of Fletcher's marks to be taken as his own, and whom *Stiefel*, in his study of the sources of *The Island Princess*, calls the noblest

of all Fletcher's heroes, the one knight "sans peur et sans reproche." It is undeniable that Armusia is free from all vices and lacks even Caratach's habit of scolding. He combines in himself, too, the virtues of bravery, chastity, piety, and faithfulness, if need be even unto death, but he fails utterly to move us, because, like Caratach, he is lifted out of the stress of real temptation and so lacks one of the strongest humanizing touches. Both he and Caratach sin against the sound Aristotelian canon² which provides that the hero shall not be beyond the reach of sympathy either in goodness or in evil.

It is a part of the same weakness that Fletcher cannot portray a villain without putting him beyond the pale of our pity. He cares little for Aristotle's rule which calls for a certain compassion for the evil doer, to be brought about by some softening light on his character or some hint of injustice inflicted upon him. He gives us villains of the Richard III type, in that they never waver and never repent—except in those absurdly instantaneous conversions for which there is no justification.

Nor does the villainy of such figures of his even afford us the gratification of an interesting psychological study as is markedly the case with Richard III, where we gradually come to know the secret windings of his crafty nature. Fletcher's villains, indeed, have no secret windings to their natures, but rather a plain desire for animal enjoyment and no great subtlety in devising ways to gratify it. Moreover, they have no gift for introspection, and when they take us into their confidence it is not to throw light on a complicated and highly developed individuality but only to show in advance some of the various turns of the plot in which they are involved. They do not, to any degree, rationalize their wickedness for us by such delicate mental processes as Richard often employs in his self-communings. Their badness is, in the larger sense, unmotivated and thus uninteresting. They stand out as unrelievedly base and bestial, and because they show no capacity for being stirred by the higher impulses—whether of a moral or an intellectual sort—they seem to us not worth while, either as human beings or as artistic creations. This is true of Borosky in *The Loyal Subject*, Frederick and Sorano in *A Wife for a Month*, the Governor of Ternata in *The Island Princess*, and, to a less marked extent, of Valentinian in the play of that name. In the latter character Fletcher indeed makes some attempt at palliation, especially in

¹*Ueber die Quelle von J. Fletcher's Island Princess.* Herrig's Archiv, 103, p. 299.

²*Poetics of Aristotle*, Butcher ed., 1898, p. 65.

the earlier scenes with Aecius; in his momentary self-reproach before his crime; in his tenderness to his wife in his last moments; and in hers towards him throughout the play. The effort, however, is not successful, for the aim at relief is inartistically obvious and beyond a certain hesitancy in Valentinian which arises chiefly from weakness of will, offers no argument against the impression of him which remains with us, as a nature virtually undiluted in its evil. There is no real conflict of moral forces.

Poenius in *Bonduca* is, on the whole, Fletcher's most successful attempt at the delineation of inward struggle. Even in him, however, we have rather a succession than a conflict of emotions. Pride leads to disobedience, then patriotism displaces pride and induces shame, despair, and suicide. The large lines of spiritual experience are well laid down and the shifting of moods is in the natural order; but the subtle interplay of impulses is lacking from first to last; for the soul surrenders itself to each as it comes. This may in some temperaments be natural, but it misses the prime essential of the genuinely tragic, because there is no real struggle.

Dryden has summed up the defects of Fletcher's methods of characterization in blaming the poet who is "more in pain to tell you what has happened to a man than what he was."¹ For him very tangible conflicts go on—the opposition of one corporeal man to another; but the clash of the secret souls or the war of forces in the same soul are species of battle never dreamed of in the world which he builds about his plays.

(5) *Comic complication.*

In comedy the spiritual limitation of Fletcher's is, of course, far less evident; for although it is permitted to infuse a certain seriousness into such plays, it is not required. Comedy, legitimizes, too, the element of chance, which is fully in keeping with Fletcher's slight philosophy of life, and is satisfied with the less strenuous complications which were by no means beyond his grasp. His mind was of that supple and elastic variety which moves easily in the lighter grooves of thought and feeling, and he had a cleverness in contriving comic situations which came nearer here than elsewhere to serving the purpose of originality. With him the organizing motive is not the solution of any mysterious intrigue or the steady accumulation even of comic retribution upon a victim, but the interplay of two humorously conceived

¹*Preface to Troilus and Cressida, Grounds for Criticism in Tragedy.* Scott-Saintsbury ed., VI, p. 270.

groups on the principle of action and re-action. The moment of suspense comes with every trick of the gay intrigues, and the constant reversal of fortune keeps expectation busy. The complication is thus rather linked than cumulative and the interest is distributed throughout the play. An examination into the complications of a few of the comedies may serve to illustrate the point.

THE WOMAN'S PRIZE.

(Time—The wedding day of Petruchio and Maria, and afterwards.)

MAIN PLOT.

<i>Petruchio</i>	<i>Maria</i>
Has reputation for tyrannizing over his former wife.	Determines to avoid future trouble by subduing her husband at once and adopts the following measures:—I, 2.
	1—Refuses to obey his summons, barricades her apartments and declares herself in a state of siege; treats with Petruchio from a window, gains promise of privileges as to money, guests, dress, etc.; siege is raised. I, 3, II, 6.
	2—Makes reckless expenditures and continues to flout Petruchio's authority. III, 2.
Driven to self-defense, adopts these measures to arouse Maria's interest and affection:—III, 2.	
1—Pretends illness. III, 4.	Accepts his pretense as real, calls his disease infectious and hurries all the household away, leaving him in strict confinement, with the watch in attendance. III, 4.

Frightens the watch into flight,
bursts open the door and re-
leases himself, vowing new ven-
geance. III, 4.

2—Pretends that he will travel.
IV, 5.

Receives the news joyfully and
threatens a gay life during Pe-
truchio's absence. IV, 5.

Pretense abandoned in disgust and
a new one resolved on. V, 2.

3—Pretends death and has himself
brought before Maria in a coffin
while all reproach her for his
death. V, 4.

Pretends to weep, but explains that
all her grief is for "his poor, un-
manly, wretched, foolish life."
V, 4.

Rises from the coffin with angry
reproaches but soon confesses
himself fairly outwitted and
cured of his hectoring tenden-
cies. V, 4.

Declares herself satisfied with his
state of mind and ready to prove
herself an obedient wife. V, 4.

RECONCILIATION. V. 4.

THE WILD GOOSE CHASE.

(1) MAIN PLOT.

*Oriana**Mirabel*

Loves the scornful Mirabel and
takes these means to entrap him.

1—Her brother disguises himself
as a lord of Savoy come to
sue for her hand. He at-
tacks Mirabel's conduct in
the latter's hearing, but
Oriana defends it. III, 1.

2—Pretends madness as the result
of Mirabel's treatment and
raves prettily before him,
while all reproach him. IV, 3.

3—Pretends to be the sister of a
former beneficiary of Mira-
bel's and the bearer of a leg-
acy left him by her brother.
V, 1, 3, 4, 5, 6.

Is pleased at her defense of him
and determines that the lord
from Savoy shall not have her,
but when Oriana's trick is dis-
covered mocks her in a merry
song. III, 1.

Blames himself greatly and makes
her an offer of marriage. Dis-
covers her trick again and again
withdraws. IV, 3.

Does not recognize her, consents
to marry the stranger, again dis-
covers the trick, but this time
confesses himself vanquished and
ready for marital bonds. V, 6.

(2) SUB-PLOT.

Lillia Bianca and Rosalura, merry maidens and friends to Oriana, are loved by the whimsical friends of Mirabel, Pinac and Belleur and though returning the affection severally bestowed, determine to lead their lovers a merry dance before yielding.

(a)

Lillia Bianca.

Pinac

Entertains Pinac in her apartments and convinces him that his wooing will need all his wit. II, 2.

Pretends to be visited by an English countess, thinking to arouse Lillia's jealousy. III, 1.

Pretends great grief and goes to his house as if to lament, but there exposes his trick and proves his countess to be a courtesan of the place. IV, 1.

(b)

Rosalura

Belleur

Meeting Belleur in the garden, pretends to think him a vagrant and offends him deeply. II, 3. Is reinforced by Lillia and a posse of women who put Belleur to flight. IV, 2.

Meditates constantly on revenge and finally resorts to taunts and reproaches amounting to persecution. IV, 2.

General reconciliation in the last scene brought about by the clever insistence of the maidens. V, 6.

RULE A WIFE AND HAVE A WIFE.

(1) MAIN PLOT.

Margarita

A gay young heiress who, wishing the support of a husband's name without having to respect his authority, decides to marry.

Orders Leon to attend on her lover the Duke of Medina and other guests. III, 1.

Speaks roughly to him before her guests. III, 5.

Urges excuses but to no avail. IV, 3.

Pretends (to vex Leon) that the house is not hers. IV, 3.

Leon

A clever low-born soldier who would gain a fortune and become master of a home. This ambition entails two sets of intrigues.

1—*Intrigues for winning Margarita.*

a—Presents himself before her as a suitor—professes abject humility and is accepted—immediate marriage decided upon. II, 3.

b—Obeys but gives warning of future resistance. III, 1.

2—*Measures for subduing her.*

a—Declares himself master in his own house. III, 5.

b—Receives appointment in the army and declares that Margarita shall go with him to war. IV, 3.

c—Declares that they will then move to another. IV, 3.

Confesses her trick to Leon and gets permission to delay her journey. IV, 3.

d—Gains promise from Margarita to humiliate her lover Cacofogo. V, 1.

Professes full obedience to Leon and gets much freedom in return. Receives the duke of Medina into her house by a trick. V, 3.

e—Tells her that her deception is discovered and will be frustrated. V, 3.

Kneels for forgiveness, promising all obedience for the future. V, 3.

Humbles both the Duke and Cacofogo. V, 5.

(2) SUB-PLOT.

Estafania

The maid of Margarita, pretends in her mistress' absence, that the house is her own and so deceives Perez into marrying her. I, 1, 3, 6.

Margarita arriving at home, Estafania beguiles Perez away on the plea of leaving the house to a cousin. II, 4.

Learning her husband's poverty, she rifles his trunk and deserts him. III, 4.

Perez

A penniless soldier, who, dazzled by the prospect of gaining a fortune himself, pretends wealth to gain the lady's consent. I, 1, 3, 6.

Discovers from two sources that Estefania has deceived him and resolves to be revenged upon her. III, 4, 5.

They meet, quarrel and are reconciled, Perez being persuaded that Estafania has been slandered to him. IV, 1.

Perez goes to claim Margarita's house, but finds himself to have been deceived a second time by Estafania—is fired with desire for vengeance again. IV, 3.

They meet—he would do her violence at first, but is so won to admiration by her cleverness that he finally confesses himself glad to surrender to her—complete reconciliation follows. V, 4, 5.

The method at work in these plays is apparent and is Fletcher's characteristic one in comedy. The ball of mischief flies back and forth and the spirit of fun presides over all. The author's lightness of touch is at its best and his ingenuity almost invariably works out pleasing turns of the plot. Here, at least, material and method are at one.

VIII.

THE SPIRIT OF THE COMEDIES.

From every point of view it is clear that Fletcher's muse was the comic; for whenever he touches the more serious aspects of life he is weighed in the balances only to be found wanting. In neither tragedy nor tragi-comedy were his movements free, although he was drawn to them by their spectacular possibilities and knew how to produce popular plays of both types by diverting interest from his weaknesses to his points of strength. It is noticeable, too, that when the pressure of Beaumont's influence was removed, the comedies began to come from Fletcher's pen with a steady frequency, and that the tragedies and tragi-comedies in which Beaumont collaborated are held the greatest of all their works, while the later plays of these classes in which Fletcher worked alone are, in the main, greatly inferior to his productions in the lighter vein.

From the point of view of the reader the tragi-comedies are the least pleasing and convincing of all Fletcher's separate group; for while in the tragedies he keeps down his more violent tendencies to improbability and in the comedies justifies his extravagance by its results, he posits in the tragi-comedies a world at least half serious and then neglects the obligations, thus incurred, to solve its problems reasonably. From this there results in the mind of his readers a certain resentment, as if their credulity had been tampered with, while at the same time a definite impression is received of the author's inadequacy for his task.

In the comedies, however, this is far from being the case; for although he hurries us through a maze of highly improbable happenings, he generates his atmosphere as he goes, and the very rapidity of his movement begets a breeziness and exhilaration that sweep us unquestioningly along even into the midst of the marvellous array of coincidences which he marshals at the close. He takes little pains to reconcile us to any separate improbability, but choosing a world of extravagance, he undertakes to please rather by the audacity of his imaginings than by any concession to a sober common sense. Having the art to impose his mood upon us, he captivates by his very excesses.

It is precisely this mood of Fletcher's and his power to project it into others that explain his gift for comedy; for it must be granted that even in this realm he had his limitations. He lacked entirely the exquisite subtlety which Meredith¹ demands in the comic spirit and was prevented from the perception of the deeper ironies that constitute truest comedy by the same want of inner vision which denied him a grasp on the genuinely tragic. Granting, however, that he failed in both these points, it still remains true that he had for the comedy of the lighter vein an instinct and a facility which Beaumont did not, at any rate, prove himself to possess,² and which made Fletcher a literary dictator in this especial field.

In the spirit and attitude of his comedies Fletcher showed himself equally remote from Shakspeare and from Ben Jonson; for he had none of the fine and unobtrusive moral sense of the one or the deliberate didacticism of the other. It has been pointed out by Miss Woodbridge³ that Jonson, with all his fame as the censor of his age, is not always, in the morals of his plays, a safe guide, since his awards go far more uniformly to the clever than to the good. That claim, however, even if granted, does not affect the facts that his attitude was severely judicial and that his zeal for his mission as the corrector of the follies of his age was so great that he habitually used the cynical, fault-finding tone.

With such a mood as Jonson's Fletcher had no sort of sympathy. He assumed no responsibility for the world's behavior or for that of his own age. His business, as he conceived it, was to present life, not to correct it, and he was too much a man of his time and of the gay world at large to take its foibles seriously. That he was not distinctly conscious of them is hard to believe; for his eye was keen enough in the detection of such surface values and they came directly under his observation. That he did not array himself against them is in every way characteristic of the hedonism and moral inertia of his nature. It has been so much the fashion to talk of the subserviency of Beaumont and Fletcher to their age that the delicate thrusts in which their plays abound have usually been passed over without comment; and indeed the light hearted way in which they are given is apt to prevent their detection. Beaumont's tone in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, as well as cer-

¹*Essay on Comedy*, pp. 83-84.

²In *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, Beaumont comes far nearer to Meredith's conception of comedy than Fletcher does in any of the comedies of his especial group.

³*Studies in Jonson's Comedies*, pp. 28-29.

tain touches of his in *The Scornful Lady* and *The Woman Hater*, show that when he desired he could put both boldness and vigor into his presentation of the weaknesses of his time. Fletcher, however, was a natural euphemist and shrank from the disagreeably pungent in both his morals and his art. Langbaine was one of the earlier critics to note this tendency in Fletcher and declared that his raillery was "so drest that it rather pleased than disgusted, the modest portion of his audience;"¹ while Baker in *A Companion to the Play-House* still further emphasizes the idea in his statement that Fletcher's "wit and raillery were extremely keen and poignant, yet they were, at the same time, so perfectly genteel that they used rather to please than disgust the very persons on whom they seemed to reflect."² One does not feel, however, that the satire is ever with Fletcher an end in itself, but that it comes as an incidental touch of humor or as a mere ripple on the plot. For that reason it seems hardly accurate to apply the terms "keen and poignant" to it. What he aimed at was rather a good-humored presentation of popular faults than a castigation of them, and there is no certain fibre of moral earnestness to be detected anywhere in his utterances.

Indeed, a great many, if not all, of his satiric touches follow the conventional lines of his day and are clearly used for comic effect. The doctor with his quackery is almost a constant figure³ in his plays, but the quackery is always incidental and for the purpose of exciting laughter over the persecutions to which he subjects his patient. This contrasts strongly with Jonson's treatment of a similar theme in *The Alchemist*, where the aim is primarily to expose a crying evil. The jealous husband,⁴ the lawyer,⁵ the miser,⁶ the pedant,⁷ the learned woman⁸ and various other figures passed on from classical or medieval sources, all receive attention at Fletcher's hands and are all made to serve his general dramatic purpose. Such a hit as he gives at the parson in *The Woman's Prize*, where he makes Jacques say

"Twenty to one you'll find him at the Bush, there's the best ale." III, 4. is typical of his satiric method.

¹*An Account of English Dramatick Poets*, I, 25.

²*Biographia Dramatica*. See vol. II, under *Beaumont*.

³*Monsieur Thomas*, II, 4, III, 1; *The Humorous Lieutenant*, III, 5; *The Woman's Prize*, III, 4; *The Mad Lover*, III, 2; *Valentinian*, V, 2.

⁴Lopez in *Women Pleased*, Leon in *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*, and Petruccio in *The Woman's Prize*. (Cf. Bartolus of *The Spanish Curate* in group III.)

⁵*A Wife for a Month*, V, 3, etc. (See also *The Little French Lawyer*, *The Spanish Curate*, etc., of group III.)

⁶Lopez in *Women Pleased*. (Cf. Algrife in *The Night Walker* of group III.)

⁷*Wit Without Money*, II, 4.

⁸*Women Pleased*, IV, 1; *The Wild Goose Chase*, II, 2; *The Woman's Prize*, III, 3.

He has thrusts too at the Puritans, but the especial foible of his age which calls out some show of vigor in his touch is the mania for travel and for foreign fashion. Indeed, the theme is so common with him that one almost suspects a real conviction on his part, although that conviction never emerges in definite form. *The Wild Goose Chase* might almost be taken, *en masse*, as a light satire on foreign travel, and the comic plot of *Monsieur Thomas* has constant thrusts of a similar sort. Thus Mirabel, just returned from Italy, exclaims,

"There's nothing good or handsome bred amongst us. Till we are travelled and live abroad, we are coxcombs." I, 2.

Later De Gard rebukes Mirabel for his folly by saying,

"Be not too glorious foolish, sum not your travels up with vanities." II, 1.

In *Monsieur Thomas*, Launcelot thus introduces to Sebastian, the father of Thomas, his son lately arrived from a sojourn in Paris:—

"Your son, my master,
Or Monsieur Thomas (for so his travel styles him)
* * * * *
Through many foreign plots that virtue meets with
And dangers (I beseech you give attention)
Is at the last arrived
To ask your (as the Frenchman calls it sweetly)
"Benediction de jour en jour."

While Sebastian replies:—

"Sirrah, do not conjure me with your French furies,
Leave me your rotten language and tell me plainly
And quickly sirrah, lest I crack your French crown
What your good master means." I, 2.

The motive is equally prominent in plays of Group III, notably in *The Queen of Corinth*, where Onos has grown old in travelling over the world with his tutor and has gotten for all his pains only a restless craving for motion and a mind shrivelled for lack of useful activity.¹

¹Another of the abuses of the time which Fletcher did not hesitate to set forth plainly was the immorality of the court, but as he makes no very conspicuous mention of it in the comedies, the discussion of his attitude towards it is a digression here. There is hardly a king in his group of plays who is not the creature of his passions lying in wait to ensnare a virtuous woman. *Valentinian*, *The Humorous Lieutenant*, *The Loyal Subject* and *A Wife for a Month* are instances of this. The exceptions are in *The Island Princess* and *The Mad Lover*, although in both of these the king is hardly more than a background figure and so is slightly developed. It is true that the dramatic possibilities of such a situation naturally appealed to Fletcher; at the same time such sentiments as are found, for instance, in *The Humorous Lieutenant* intimate his recognition of unjustifiable conditions in the life of which he was, to some extent, a part.

"She studies to undo the court, to plant here
The enemy of our age, chastity." (IV, 1.)

One may easily gather from the mildness of Fletcher's satire as well as from the general tone of his comedies that he had not been influenced by Sidney's view of comedy as a scornful presentation of error.¹ He sought primarily to entertain and to amuse and so, as a rule, laid hold of only such follies as were laughable. Besides this his emphasis is so little on his characters that he does not concern himself with either their virtues or their vices except so far as these prove directly contributory to the interest of his plots. In the comedies he never involves his characters in issues which seem to him seriously moral, and they are all constructed on a selective principle which leaves out troublesome scruples or pious proclivities and makes them able to adjust their morals to any dramatic necessity which may arise. Indeed, they are conscienceless creatures, guiltless of any suspicion of moral law.

It naturally follows, too, that in his comic characters Fletcher did not find his chief interest in traits that were repulsive or even disagreeable. Whatever may be said of the blackness of the villains found in his tragedies or tragi-comedies, such a comedy character as Jonson's Volpone would have been for him a psychological and artistic impossibility, not only from its intensity, but because Fletcher himself was endowed with a certain type of aestheticism upon which such a conception—however moral its teaching—would inevitably have jarred.

Nor did he seize upon anything savoring of weakness or physical defects as affording him sources of amusement. Some exaggerated temperamental bent or some other eccentricity with strong comic possibilities is usually his starting point with comedy characters and his attitude towards them is invariably good natured and indulgent, although he generally allows them to pay the penalty of their excesses of mood. Thus "the humorous lieutenant"² is so constituted that when sickness comes upon him, he has all the possibilities of a hero within him, but in health is one of the most arrant of cowards. Obviously the way to make the most of this remarkable temperament for dramatic purposes

So also in *The Loyal Subject*, where the daughters of Archas reproach their father for exposing them to the corruptions of the court. Archas urges

"The court is virtue's school. At least it should be."

And Viola replies,

"I am very fearful ;

Would I were stronger built ! You would have me honest ?"

Archas—"Or not at all, my Viola."

Viola—"I'll think on't ; for 'tis no easy promise and live there." (III, 2.)

¹*Defence of Poesy*. Cook ed. (1890), p. 28.

²The hero of the play of that name.

is to show it under both varieties of experience, and this is what Fletcher does. At first we have the lieutenant hotly refusing to fight in the critical battle of the war; then he is played upon by his fellow soldiers until he believes himself desperately ill and has been subjected to much persecution from the physicians. Finally, in a wild desire to escape these evils, he rushes out into the very teeth of the enemy, snatches their standard away from them and bears it back in triumph. In *The Pilgrim* it is the testy father who starts all the complications by trying to force his daughter to marry one suitor although she loves another, and the fits of passion into which he works himself at every turn are a constant source of comic effect. The same trait of testiness is found in Antonio in *The Chances* and Petronius in *The Woman's Prize*, with much the same treatment and results, although the plots of the plays, of course, differ.

It is true that in every case the one who has caused the mischief—in the event that there is any mischief involved—is made either to suffer some laughable punishment or at least to confess the error of his way; but there is never any permanent humiliation resulting and no matter how many intrigues and cross intrigues there may have been, there is only amity to be found at the close of the play. In this way it comes about that Fletcher's comedies never carry with them the idea of victimizing. They are conceived in the spirit of rollicking adventure and in this are radically different from those of Chapman and Jonson, who worked on the principle of "folly and exposure" and loved to set their characters up as targets for their scorn.

Moreover, it is to the cleverness of the characters themselves that Fletcher owes most of the success of his comedies; for, besides the distinguishing trait of each, he endows most of them with at least one other—a sense of humor—and the prevalence of this spirit among them becomes the source of most of the fun and complications of the plays. When once they are given the cue, they carry on the action with spirit for themselves. They love a merry trick for its own sake and so, aside from the situations which arise from chance, many are generated by sheer force of the mental agility and fun instinct of the participants. They even relish wit at their own expense and, like Robin Hood, being beaten at their own game, they are ready to acknowledge a superior. So Perez is finally won to Estefania by admiration of the very cleverness that has outwitted him, and Petruchio becomes the more enamored of his troublesome bride the more he realizes her wit in subduing him.

These comedy characters of Fletcher's have, too, with all their

moral limitations, a wonderful likeableness and charm. They understand the laws of good fellowship and combine wit and sentiment in a way that is definitely attractive. Even to the reader they make a very merry world to live in during the course of a play and they would doubtless have a double interest when genuinely alive upon the stage. Indeed, there is so much in the comedies of Fletcher which would appeal now, as strongly as ever, to a popular audience that the wonder constantly arises as to why some of them at least are not still acted today. The moral tone of many of them is, of course, a serious objection and after Mr. Barrett Wendell's strong assertions¹ in regard to the undesirability of making such a suggestion, one hesitates to be identified with the recommendation, and yet the writer believes that *Wit Without Money*, *The Woman's Prize*, *The Wild Goose Chase*, *The Pilgrim*, and even *The Chances* might with comparatively slight omissions and alterations be adapted to modern proprieties. These changes once skilfully made, the plays would have many chances for success and would assuredly satisfy people of the type of mind which finds no real enjoyment in Shakspeare. Indeed, they would furnish enjoyment to any who came to the theatre in holiday mood.

¹Mr. Wendell in his Trinity Lectures entitled *The Temper of the Seventeenth Century in English Literature* (p. 82), declares all the comedies too corrupt and indecent for popular reading and justifies the despair of a friend who being invited to prepare two or three of the plays for such reading abandoned the task because he was unwilling to give any edition of any one of the plays the sanction of his name. The feeling was not to be wondered at, though the conclusion was somewhat hasty.

IX.

CONCLUSION.

If the praise thus far meted out to Fletcher has seemed scant and half disparaging, it may be well to recall the view suggested as a starting point for our investigation—that he had neither deep spirituality nor profound intelligence, and was inferior to Beaumont, in some degree at least, in both these respects, though he had a literary personality no less clear and interesting than that of his friend, and was in some respects his superior. It has been granted, too, that both the nature and the extent of his limitations make it impossible that he should ever take rank among the greatest of all ages.

And yet, in spite of all this acknowledgment, the writer can hardly close even this brief and fugitive study without uttering some more positive word in commendation of Fletcher, for one of the results of the investigation has been a conviction that, as a rule, modern critics have not given him his full due. They have pointed out with truth his many elements of weakness, judging him, however, by a far stricter code of moral proprieties than the one under which he himself lived, and thus finding his moral taint so overshadowing that they have not been quite able to do justice to his real excellencies. Grant all his deficiencies, however, making all proper deductions for each, and even then he is doubly a master; for he not only stands in the very front rank of dramatic artists, but he has a poetic gift which is, in itself, a liberal endowment. It has been the custom, of course, to disparage this latter gift by calling its very ease and simplicity marks of the decadence of English dramatic poetry, as indicating a tendency to descend to the level of prose; and the criticism is not entirely without foundation. At the same time it is hardly just to one whose strong musical sense lifts his verse above all legitimate identification with prose. Indeed, it would seem that he had earned added praise rather than blame for subjecting his medium of expression to the perfect mastery which good drama requires, without ever detracting from its essentially poetic quality. It is not alone in his lyrics, some of which hold acknowledged rank with

the best in the language, but even more perhaps in what may be called the "rank and file" of his verse, that he shows his rare gift of poetry. His lyre is always in his hand, his ear always attuned, and however he may vary the moods of his characters or the turns of his plots, he is always able to sway his instrument into harmonious expression of the new conditions. He cannot, of course, mount to the genuinely sublime, but that is because his thought itself cannot mount and so fetters the power of utterance which would follow its leadings. Within his range, however, he has a delicate sense for proper melody, a graceful art in the choosing and adjusting of words, and a limpidity of rhythmical flow which suggest the musician hardly less than the poet. His verse swept all the moods from grave to gay, knew how to flow along in the easy narrative style of quiet conversation or quicken into the brisker chat of repartee, bristled with movement when the action grew busiest and often rose to a real dignity when the serious things of life were touched upon.

But aside from his poetic gifts, Fletcher may, as Prof. Thorndike suggests,¹ well have more honor done him as a conscious and discriminating artist. His insistent eclecticism and his constant aim at immediate success on the stage, kept him, to be sure, from surrendering himself to any classic rules, and yet it would be wrong to infer that he had not a large share of the artist's intelligence, or that he entirely neglected his higher instincts. He knew far more of what was high and true in his art than he chose to follow, for he had with all his hedonism and ideas as to expediency, a critical faculty which took its own risks deliberately and which was able to turn his work into more serious and definitely artistic channels. He showed this in *The Faithful Shepherdess*, where he openly defied both the popular taste and his own craving for stage effect and even in his tragedies, which fall sadly short of the highest type of greatness, he proved that he could, at will, avoid many of the technical faults of his haste and indifference. One has only to study his marvellous insight into dramatic economies, observe the skill with which he chooses, shifts, and supplements his material, and follow his method in meeting the limitations of his stage and turning its very deficiencies into elements of success, to realize that he is well nigh incomparable as a master of stagecraft, and that he needed only the leaven of artistic seriousness to make him a dramatic artist above all reproach.

¹In a private letter April, 1905.

²*Lectures and Notes on Shakspeare and Other Dramatists*. Ashe ed., p. 446, "Shakspeare is the height, breadth and depth of genius: Beaumont and Fletcher, the excellent mechanism, in juxtaposition and succession, of talent."

If by genius is meant only that very divinest spark which illumines men's minds, we must accept for Fletcher the verdict which Coleridge pronounced upon both the dramatists and which Jusserand has recently repeated in saying that they had "une forte dose de talent et une faible dose de génie."¹ Each poet should be judged, however, by his marks of power, no less than by his limitations.

¹*Histoire littéraire du peuple anglais*, II, p. 812.

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